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"I WILL KILL THE FIRST ONE THAT COMES NEAR ME, AND THEN SHOOT MYSELF," AND THE WHITE, RESOLUTE FACE INDICATED THAT SHE WOULD BE AS GOOD AS HER WORD,

Fancy Frank, of Colorado:

OR,

THE TRAPPER'S TRUST.

A FRONTIER STORY OF TO-DAY.

BY HON. WM. F. CODY,
("BUFFALO BILL.")

PROLOGUE.

"It's a spook or a sperrit, or I are a liar."

The speaker was a man of the border—a man alone in the wilderness of solitude around him, but one who felt no fear because none of his fellow kind were near him.

Tall, well-formed, and dressed in buckskin leggins, gray woolen shirt, moccasins and slouch hat, he was a splendid type of the borderman, while, more important than all, he was thoroughly armed with rifle, revolvers and hunting-knife.

The moon, from a cloudless sky, looked full in his face, yet the shadow of his broad hat concealed the upper part of it, and a long black beard and mustache hid from view his lower features as effectively as though he wore a mask.

But his dark eyes glittered in the moonlight, as he stood in the border of a cottonwood motte, and gazed out upon the prairie—gazed with horrified look and trembling form.

"It are a sperrit, an' it's comin' straight fer me."

Then, dropping the border dialect which he seemed to assume, he unconsciously dropped into his natural way of speaking, and from his hidden lips came the words almost mingled with a groan:

"Mark Sanford, at last the end has come! Yes, I must die, and by the hand of a being not of this world. A fearful retribution is mine."

Still glancing in horror out upon the prairie, he suddenly started and nerved himself to action as though with a determination born of despair.

"By the Heaven above! I will first try the effect of powder and ball."

Quickly his rifle sprung to his shoulder, and his keen eye glanced along the glimmering barrel as the weapon was aimed—at what?

A weird-looking form that seemed to glide, rather than walk over the prairie—a form clad in white and looking ghost-like in the moonlight.

Straight toward the motte of cottonwoods it came, until suddenly, from the shadow of the trees, burst a lurid flame; a sharp report startled the silence of the prairie, and, louder than the rattle of the rifle of the hunter, arose a wild shriek—a shriek of anguish and fright in a woman's voice.

Down upon the dew-wet prairie sunk the ghostly form, and from the lips of the man in the cottonwood came the cry:

"God in heaven! What have I done? My hermit life upon the plains has made a superstitious fool of me, and I have committed murder!"

Then, rifle in hand, he bounded toward the limp, white mass lying upon the prairie.

A moment more he was bending over the form of a woman—a woman clad in her night-dress, now bedraggled with dirt and stained with blood.

The feet were bare, torn and bleeding, and a mass of golden hair hung damp and matted upon the shoulders, and framed in a face of rare beauty—the face of a woman of twenty-five, perhaps.

She lay upon her side, her head resting upon the ground, and in her arms she clutched convulsively a child—a wee thing of four years of age—and whose startled eyes gazed into the face of the man as he bent over and placed his hand softly upon the woman.

The touch aroused her, and the large eyes opened wearily and turned upon his bearded face.

"Thank God, I behold the face of a white man! I

feared that the red fiends of the prairie were around me; but you have saved me from them, sir—saved me and my child—no, no, not me, for their bullets struck me here, and I am dying."

She placed her hand with an effort upon her breast, and the head of the trembling man bowed down in grief; he dared not tell her that his was the hand that had sent the fatal bullet to its human target.

A moment of silence followed, and then the woman again spoke, and with greater effort:

"You will care for my baby, sir—promise me, and I will die content."

"I promise you, so help me God!"

The voice was deep and stern now, and the man took his hat from his head as he spoke.

A smile crossed the face of the dying woman, and she tried again to speak, but the death-rattle came into her throat, and choked her utterance—a gasp, a tremor, and she was dead.

How long Mark Sanford bent in sorrow over that form he never knew, for he was perfectly stunned with grief; but, at last, he roused himself, and raising both mother and child in his strong arms he strode rapidly away and disappeared in the gloomy shadows of the cottonwoods.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER.

THE commandant of Fort McPherson, on the South Platte river, sat alone in his quarters, his face wearing a look of trouble, for of late many stories of Indian cruelty had reached his ears, and he feared a general uprising of the red skins.

"A young girl to see you, sir," said the orderly, entering.

"A young girl, Caspar? Who can she be?" asked the general, with some surprise—a surprise that increased to astonishment as his eyes fell upon the person that entered his quarters.

"Do I address General Emory?"

"You do, miss. How could I serve you?" replied the general, gazing with undisguised admiration upon the speaker.

It was a young girl, not certainly over seventeen years of age, and with a face of almost angelic loveliness, for every feature was perfect.

The eyes were large, deep-blue, and dreamy to sadness, and her hair, gold-brown in hue, was braided and hung down her back far below her waist.

Her form was slight, yet graceful in every outline, and she wore a short skirt, elaborately wrought with beads, fringed leggins, embroidered moccasins, and a loose-fitting sack, or hunting-shirt, confined at her waist with a belt, in which was stuck a pair of revolvers and a knife of small yet serviceable pattern.

At her back hung a small Winchester rifle, and upon her head was a broad dove-colored sombrero, half-encircled by a red ostrich feather.

With a quick, curious glance, the maiden took in the general's quarters and then turned her beautiful eyes upon the courteous commandant, who had risen at her entrance.

"How can I serve you, miss?" repeated General Emory, placing a seat for his strange young visitor.

Declining the proffered camp-chair, the maiden replied in a voice that was sweet, yet firm:

"In serving me, sir, you can also serve yourself, for I come to warn you of danger."

"Ha! the Indians are on the war-path, then?"

"I said not what was the nature of the threatened danger, General Emory, and before I do so, I have a request to make."

"Name it; but first tell me whom I address?"

"It would do no good, for I am unknown to you, and we may never meet again. I am but a nameless waif," and the girl spoke with some sadness in her tones.

"You mistake; I know more of you than you may think. Are you not she whom the scouts and trappers speak of as the Hermit Huntress, and again as the Red Plume?"

"As I never have aught to say to your scouts and trappers, General Emory, I have no means of knowing what they call me," was the evasive reply.

"Still, I have often heard of a fair young girl who flew over the prairies by day and night, living no one knew where. Am I mistaken in believing you to be this will-o'-the-wisp of the plains?"

"The prairies are my home, sir; but where I live, or what is my name, is of little consequence so that I serve you."

"Pardon me; I meant not to pry into that which you would prefer should remain unknown, yet I cannot but feel deep interest in you, and curiosity at the life you lead. You said you came to warn me of danger, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; one of your officers and a score of men left here two days ago on a scout?" inquiringly said the girl.

"True; Lieutenant Rockwell and twenty cavalrymen—do you know aught of them?"

"They are besieged in a canyon, by Old Whistler and his band of Dog Soldier Sioux, and if not reinforced will all be massacred within twenty-four hours."

"By Jove, you do indeed bring important news, my girl! But, where is Rockwell, now? I will at once send Captain Taylor and two companies to his aid."

"Where the canyon is, General Emory, is my secret," was the cold reply.

"Then you wish to act as guide?" said the general, believing that such was her meaning.

"Upon conditions, yes."

"Name your conditions, then, that I may at once send them aid," somewhat excitedly said the general, more and more impressed with the strange behavior of the young girl.

"Will you grant my terms, if I promise to guide a force to their succor?"

"Tell me what your terms are and then I will answer you."

The maiden glanced into the face of the soldier and saw that he was determined not to commit himself, and she said slowly:

"There is a man in your command by the name of Richard Sanford?"

"Yes; he is now sentenced to death for killing a brother soldier. What know you of him?"

"You must save his life, General Emory."

"Impossible! In two days he is to be shot."

"He must go free! Give him his liberty under condition that he never again returns to this part of the country."

"I say it is impossible; he must die," sternly declared the general.

"Then so must Lieutenant Rockwell and his men die!" came the quick retort.

General Emory started. He was not in the habit of being thus spoken to, and a mere girl was beard-ing the lion in his den, as it were.

"I can relieve him from the danger without your aid, for I shall immediately start a squadron upon his trail."

"The storm of last night has effectually obliterated every trace of the trail. I tell you, General Emory, that I alone can serve you."

The general felt that the girl held the advantage, yet he did not wish to yield, for the man, Richard Sanford, then under sentence of death, had given him much trouble, and having wantonly shot down a fellow-soldier, in a dispute over a game of cards, he had been condemned most justly to death, and he did not wish to take the responsibility of releasing him.

The maiden seemed to read what was passing in the thoughts of the general, and said earnestly:

"General Emory, will you let the life of a worthless murderer stand between the lives of noble men, such as Lieutenant Rockwell and his soldiers?"

"If I grant your request, what guarantee have I of your good faith?"

The young girl smiled and answered quickly:

"Release Richard Sanford, and then I will go with the squadron you send to the aid of Lieutenant Rockwell, and if my words prove untrue, I will surrender myself as a prisoner."

"My dear girl, I could never make war upon a woman, and if you deceive me you are free to go your way with your own conscience. What this man Sanford can be to you I cannot of course know, but—"

"You mistake, sir; I never saw Richard Sanford in my life, nor do I care to."

General Emory seemed puzzled; if she never saw the man, why this interest in him?

"Orderly."

The orderly at once appeared in the doorway.

"Go and bring the condemned prisoner Sanford here; but do not speak with him."

The soldier saluted and departed upon his errand, while General Emory again turned to his strange visitor.

"As you will not tell me your name, I will have to call you by the one the scouts and trappers give you; so I would ask, Miss Red Plume, why you are interested in one whom you never saw?"

"For reasons which I cannot explain, sir, I do not wish Richard Sanford to die, and most earnestly I thank you for setting him free. Now I am ready to guide the squadron to the relief of Lieutenant Rockwell."

"In half an hour you shall be on your way; but, in the mean time, I will have you some refreshments ordered. Ah, here is the prisoner."

As the general spoke the orderly entered, accompanied by the condemned man.

"Orderly, say to Captain Taylor that I would see him," and General Emory turned toward the culprit, who met his gaze unflinchingly.

He was a man scarcely thirty years of age, possessed a tall and muscular form, and a face strangely handsome yet marked with lines of dissipation.

He was dressed in uniform, and upon his sleeve were the marks left by tearing off his rank as a sergeant.

That his station in life had been far above that of a private soldier was evident; and that some secret hung over his past life, all knew, yet none could solve the mystery regarding him.

He had been in the army on the border for five years, and in that time had been repeatedly punished for his wild and reckless behavior; but his gallantry in battle and readiness to undertake any desperate service, had gained for him a certain respect, until he had ruthlessly shot down a comrade, and then the sentence of death had been passed upon him.

The maiden, as he entered, eyed him curiously, but there was no sign of recognition in her look, while he glanced at her with a slight start of surprise at her beauty, more than a gaze that recalled her face as being familiar to him.

"Sanford, at the request of this young girl I spare your life. You know best why she asks it of me," and the general gazed straight into the face of the prisoner, whose face flushed quickly as he again glanced at the maiden, and replied, promptly:

"I am wholly at a loss to account for her interest in me, yet very grateful to her; I never saw her before, sir."

Again a puzzled look came over the general's face.

"Sanford, within the hour you must leave the fort, and never return to it again; nay, more, you must never visit any fort or Government Trading Post on this frontier, but leave these parts forever, for if you do not, your life shall be the forfeit. You own a horse, I believe; get him from the quartermaster, and the sooner you depart the better. Orderly, take his irons off."

The orderly obeyed, and with only a salute to General Emory, and a strange glance at the maiden, the pardoned prisoner left the quarters, his eyes flashing, but his face perfectly emotionless.

A moment after the departure of Dick Sanford, as

he was generally known, Captain Alf Taylor entered and was presented to the maiden.

"Captain, this young girl brings us information that Rockwell and his men are in a canyon, hemmed in by Old Whistler and his Dog Soldiers. Get a squadron ready at once, and you will have as a guide this maiden, who promises to conduct you in safety to the spot."

The officer bowed and departed to order out his men, and half an hour after the squadron of cavalry left the fort at a trot, and in advance rode Red Plume, mounted upon a wiry little mustang, while by her side was Captain Taylor, already half in love with the mysterious girl.

As the cavalcade disappeared over a roll in the prairie, a single horseman left the fort, well-mounted and armed, and followed the trail of the troopers.

That horseman was Dick Sanford.

CHAPTER II.

JUST IN TIME.

As untiring as her wiry mustang, the girl guide pushed rapidly along, heading in a southerly course toward the Republican.

After a few hours' ride a halt was called for a short rest, and then again the squadron pushed on, following no trail, and only guided by the maiden, who seemed wholly confident in her powers of prairie-craft.

At length darkness came on, and still the unerring guide hesitated not, but held on her way at the same steady gait she had kept up during the afternoon.

Toward midnight she came to a halt, and the troopers went into camp for a short while, and Captain Taylor, unable to engage his fair young guide in conversation, threw himself down upon his blanket to rest.

Unconsciously he dropped off to sleep, and an hour after was awakened by a sentinel, who told him that the maiden had left camp.

Taking all things into consideration, for he knew upon what terms the maiden had acted as guide, Captain Taylor began to fear that he had been made a fool of, and that, having accomplished her object, the release of Sanford, she had departed now, none knew where.

To follow her he knew was useless, for not a steed in the squadron was the equal of the little mustang she rode; and then, it would be impossible to strike her trail in the night.

"But I'll track you to your den in the morning, my beauty, for I do not believe that Rockwell is in a trap; it was all a nice story of yours to get that fellow away," said the irate captain, and he again sought to rest, but sleep would not come to him, and he tossed about upon his blanket, until, with a muttered imprecation, he sprang to his feet, to behold by his side the one who had driven sleep from him.

"Ha! you are back again? I had not expected to see you any more."

"You wronged me, sir; but, get your men quietly mounted; we will be just in time."

A ride of an hour brought them to where the country was rolling, with occasional hills and cut with deep canyons; but unerringly the guide held her way until she came to some timber land, and here she halted.

"Captain Taylor, a mile beyond here is the canyon in which Lieutenant Rockwell is besieged; the Indians are some two hundred in number, and entirely surround him. I would advise that you attack them at once, for in half an hour it will be daylight."

Captain Taylor gave the necessary orders to his officers and men, and then turned to ask his guide some questions regarding the best point to attack; but she was nowhere to be seen.

Mysteriously she had drawn out of the line and disappeared in the darkness.

"Come, Riley; we must move on to the attack,"

and Captain Taylor moved to Lieutenant Burr Riley, who had accompanied him with twenty men of "I" Company of the Fifth Cavalry.

"And you really believe the pretty girl has not made a fool of us all?" asked Burr Riley, with a light laugh.

"I really place perfect trust in the girl—ha!"

The exclamation was caused by suddenly hearing a volley of carbines, followed by wild yells from a hundred throats, amid which mingled the well-known cheer of soldiery.

"Forward, men! trot, charge!" yelled Captain Taylor, and away bounded the troopers to the aid of the comrades they now knew to be in deadly danger.

At full speed they dashed along, guided in the darkness by the rattle of firearms and yells of combatants, and just as the gray light of approaching day appeared in the east, they came upon the scene of conflict.

It was a wooded hill, in the side of which was a deep canyon, from which belched forth a steady stream of fire.

Around the canyon's mouth, and upon the hill-sides, were scores of red-skins, charging upon those besieged in the cut, and pouring upon them a galling fire, while they made the air ring with their wild yells—yells that were answered back by the brave defenders of the canyon.

"At them, men!"

The clear voice of Captain Taylor was answered by a cry from the troopers, and ere the surprised Indians were aware of a foe in their rear, the cavalry, a hundred strong, charged into their midst, and joined in the work of death.

Taken wholly by surprise, just as they knew the small party in the canyon were wholly in their power, the Dog Soldier Sioux sought shelter on the hill-side, and attempted to check the onslaught of their foes; but the troopers pressed them close, and the red-skins were put to flight, pursued by the victorious soldiers.

"Just in time, my dear fellow, for it was about up with us, as provisions were out, and ammunition going fast. I owe you my life, and the lives of my men," and Lieutenant Charlie Rockwell grasped the hand of Captain Taylor.

"You owe it to a beautiful young girl, who seems more like a spirit of the plains than human, and not to me, Rockwell, that you still retain your hair. We were but instruments in the hands of an angel."

"A young girl! an angel! What mean you, captain?" asked Charlie Rockwell, in surprise.

"Just what I say," and he went on to tell the lieutenant the story of the maiden's visit to the fort, the conditions on which she acted as guide, and her mysterious disappearance.

"Strange! I know of no such girl. Doubtless she is the one the boys sometimes see, and call Red Plume. She must be a captive of the Indians, who, having grown up in their midst, knows no other life. Poor girl! I pity her, and I will—"

"What, Rockwell?" asked Burr Riley, as the other paused.

"Go into camp, for several of my men have been killed and a number wounded, and we need rest."

"Then we will camp here, for my men and horses are also fagged out. After a rest, Rockwell, you can go to the fort with the wounded, and I will push on after the red-skins and give them another lesson."

A few moments after the troopers were encamped; the savory smell of broiling meat and coffee arose upon all sides, and the camp presented a most picturesque scene, with a group of dead soldiers lying there, a larger number of slain Indians scattered about, the surgeon and his assistants busy with the wounded, scores of cavalymen preparing their rude, but palatable breakfast, and the horses in the background lariatied out to feed upon the prairie grass—a scene for a painter to portray on canvas, and once participated in never to be forgotten.

CHAPTER III.

TRACKED.

It was evident, from the manner in which the girl guide left the trooper band, that she wished to avoid being seen as she glided into the shadow of the timber the very moment she saw that no eye was upon her.

With an almost noiseless step her mustang threaded his way for a few hundred yards; then a slight pressure upon the rein caused him to halt.

"We must wait here, Whalebone, and see what those troopers are going to do. They are suspicious of us, but they don't know us, do they, pony?" and she patted her mustang caressingly upon the neck.

But she had not long to wait, for to her ears soon came the sounds of conflict, which had sent the troopers forward to the rescue in their rapid charge.

Instantly wheeling her pony, the young girl followed on after the soldiers, drawing rein only when she came in sight of the combat.

"Oh, this is terrible," she murmured, dropping her reins and clasping her hands.

And a terrible sight indeed it was for woman's eyes to gaze upon; but the fight did not last long, and, seeing the Indians put to flight, the maiden wheeled her mustang and darted away at a rapid gallop.

Following the trail of the troopers back to where she had left them, she turned to the left, and still pushed on at a swift pace.

For several miles her untiring pony held his steady, easy gallop, and then suddenly stumbled and fell heavily to the earth.

Wholly unprepared for such an act in her sure-footed mustang, the young girl was thrown over his head, and was stunned by the fall.

At length, however, she opened her eyes and gazed around her, and then with an effort arose to her feet.

The sun was now above the horizon, and her pony, heartily ashamed of himself, to judge by his looks, stood near, not daring to chew the grass he had in his mouth.

"Naughty Whalebone, to play me such a shabby trick! You might have broken my neck; but I'll forgive you, as you look so repentant," and she started toward the pony, but stopped suddenly as the sound of hoofs came to her ears.

Quickly she sprung toward the mustang, as though to mount him, dreading danger; but Whalebone, doubtless expecting punishment from her hasty approach, wheeled suddenly and darted away, just as a horseman came over the crest of the prairie, not a hundred yards distant.

Instantly the Red Plume shook herself together, as it were, and her rifle was slung round ready for use, for in that wild land she looked upon every man as a foe.

Seeing her movement, the horseman drew rein and raised his hands above his head, in token of peace, while he again slowly advanced until within a few yards of the maiden.

"Well, sir?"

Her tone was determined, and she still held the rifle ready for use.

"Fair girl, have you so soon forgotten one whom you saved from death?"

The horseman spoke in a soft and yet earnest tone, at the same time dismounting.

"I know you as Dick Sanford; what would you with me?"

"You are cruel toward me, now that my life is no longer in danger," said the man quietly.

"Our trails do not lead together, Dick Sanford, so leave me!"

"Not until I know more of you, and why it was that you came to the fort to save my life."

"Let it be sufficient to feel that I did so, without asking my reasons."

"It is not sufficient, though. I took your trail and followed you, for I was told the terms upon which you gained my release, and from your own lips I

would know more. Have we ever met before, and am I so remiss as to forget it?"

"Except in the fort, no; and I am sorry we have met a second time."

"Again you are unkind; but I am not sorry, for I longed to thank you for the life you saved from an ignominious death; I wished to gaze once more into your beautiful face, and beg you to tell me why you took so deep an interest in me?"

"My motive you can never know. You are free to go your way, and if you have any regard for yourself, lead a different life in the future from what you have in the past."

"By Heaven! you *do* know me, girl, and I am determined to hear from you that which you *can* tell me."

The flashing eyes of the young girl now met his; her rifle again came up threateningly, and the man quickly added:

"Pardon me, for I meant not to offend; on the contrary, I would now offer you the life you have saved; let me devote it to you, fair girl, and—"

He paused, for he saw a dangerous glitter in the eyes of the maiden, and his ears caught the ominous click of the rifle held in her hand.

"Leave me, Dick Sanford!"

"Why treat me thus?" he cried, earnestly. "I have no home, no friends who care aught for me. I am just driven an outcast from the fort, and the life that I now have I owe to you. Is it a wonder then, fair girl, that I seek to know more of you, and would offer you that life?"

His words, his manner seemed to momentarily soften her bearing toward him, for she lowered her rifle and rested the butt upon the ground.

Then, as quick as the lightning flash, he sprung toward her, and instantly her hands were held in his iron grasp.

"Dick Sanford, release me, for if you offer me harm there is one who will track you to the end of the earth to avenge me!" said the young girl, in ringing tones.

"No, I will not release you until you tell me who and what you are. I entreated you, and my words fell uselessly upon your ears; now I will force from your pretty mouth that which I would know."

The girl felt that she was in the power of a wicked man; yet her courage did not forsake her, for if her hands were once free, so that she could grasp her trusty revolvers, she did not dread him, and she smiled defiantly in his face, while she said, in cutting tones:

"Base indeed must be the man who would harm a woman, and one who had saved him from a deserved death for the cruel murder of a comrade."

"By Heaven, girl, your irony and defiance but make me the more determined to know more of you. Answer my questions and you shall go free unharmed; but refuse, and I swear to you I will carry you to the village of the Indian chief, Medicine Bear, and give you over to the cruelest torture that red-skin devilry can devise."

The young girl turned pale in spite of her pluck, and asked entreatingly:

"How have I wronged you, Dick Sanford, that you should wish me such a fate?"

"Girl, listen to me! There is some secret at the bottom of your coming to the fort and saving my life. You are but a tool, I believe, in the hands of others, and I am determined to know who sent you, for I believe my life was saved that I might meet a worse fate from those whom I know would gladly kill me. You see I am a desperate man, and I warn you to tell me that which I would know."

"And I refuse," came the defiant response.

"Then you shall go with me, girl," and with a savage oath the man held her firmly with one arm, while he drew from his pocket a stout cord.

"Pard, are you not rushing matters here a little?"

As the sound of a strange voice fell upon their

ears, the maiden gave a quick cry of joy while Dick Sanford, releasing her, dropped his hand upon his revolver and turned toward the speaker.

"Hands off dangerous weapons, pard, for I have you covered," was the calm warning of the stranger, and Dick Sanford felt that he was in the power of a man who, he saw at a glance, was not to be trifled with.

CHAPTER IV.

QUEEN'S ADVENTURE.

LOUIS WOODBRIDGE, the post trader at Fort McPherson, was a man whom all respected, if they did not like him, for he was known to be "on ther squar' clean through," as the boys expressed it.

He had come to the post some years before the opening of this story, accompanied by his only child, a daughter, who, at the time of his arrival, was in her thirteenth year.

Though her father was a stern man, and seemed often to be brooding over some unpleasant memory of the past, he was ever most cheerful in the presence of his daughter, Queen, and between the two there existed a love that was almost idolatrous in its strength.

From a very pretty girl Queen Woodbridge grew into a beautiful woman, and her father's comfortable cabin home had many visitors, among them the young officers of the fort.

Though a frontier maiden, Queen had received many advantages, for her father was a man of education, and he had engaged the fort chaplain and his wife to teach his daughter, until she became quite proficient in her books, needlework and music, not to speak of her being a most thorough housekeeper, as many who had been entertained at the Woodbridge home could testify.

Though having scores of lovers, Queen Woodbridge had never seemed to care for any one in particular, and yet she made a half-way exception of a man whom few liked and all seemed to fear.

Whether it was his splendid form, handsome face, superb horsemanship, fame as an unerring shot, or the fact that he had once saved her life on the prairie, when her horse was thrown down by an enraged buffalo bull, none could tell; but certain it is she always had a sweet smile for Dick Sanford, though he wore no officer's straps upon his shoulders.

Appreciating the service that Dick Sanford had rendered his daughter, Louis Woodbridge ever had a kind word for him, though he did not like the man; yet he watched most closely his every attention to Queen, and on several occasions warned her against him, when he believed that she was becoming too much interested in the reckless young soldier.

When at last Dick Sanford took the life of his comrade, all watched what the effect of his sentence would be upon Queen; but, woman-like, if she felt any deep sorrow for his fate, she carefully concealed it, and her father rejoiced to see that he was wrong in the surmise that she had loved the wild fellow.

Shortly after word came to Queen that Dick Sanford had been released, and had left the fort, banished from it forever, and that a young and beautiful girl had gained his freedom, one whom no one knew, but whom the scouts reported to have seen upon the prairie at different times, and had named the Red Plume.

Queen made no comment upon the subject, but after the departure of her informant she mounted her favorite riding pony, and soon after was dashing away across the prairie as fast as her horse could carry her.

After dropping the post from sight, she made a circuit in the direction she had been told Dick Sanford was seen to go, and soon crossed the trail of the troopers.

Into this trail she turned and continued on rapidly for an hour or more, and still no sign of the one she sought; it was growing late in the afternoon, and

she felt that she must give up the chase; so, with a reluctant sigh, she turned her mustang to the right-about, and started slowly homeward.

As she rode along, a troubled look rested upon her face, and from her lips broke the words:

"Oh, that I could have seen him, that I might tell him I had not deserted him and left him to his fate. Now he has gone away and will ever believe me ungrateful."

As the shadows began to lengthen, Queen saw that she must hasten, for darkness would overtake her as it was before she reached the post.

Urging her pony into a gallop once more, she had gone but a few hundred yards, when over a rise in the prairie she suddenly beheld the feather, head-dress and painted face of an Indian.

Quickly her whip fell sharply upon the flank of her mustang, and away he bounded, the keen lash urging him on at every step, for Queen was now thoroughly frightened.

The hope that perhaps she had not been seen at once died in her heart, as over the hill-crest came one, two, three warriors, and shortly after, a dozen more, all well mounted, and urging on their fleet mustangs with savage joy at the prize before them.

There was no use now to lash her mustang, for, as though dreading the red-skins as much as did his mistress, the little pony with a snort of fright sped away over the prairie at his utmost speed.

But, as Queen turned her head over her shoulder, she could see that the Indians were gaining upon her.

Nearer and nearer came the savages, until the leading one was only a few lengths away, and the post was yet miles distant.

One glance behind her and Queen saw the hideous, painted face of the Sioux brave, and with a sudden impulse she could not resist she drew her revolver—a weapon she never went without—and taking a quick aim fired.

The savage saw her act and attempted to elude the shot by bending over, but the bullet went crashing through his brain and he fell heavily to the ground, while a wild yell of rage broke from the lips of his comrades, and a volley of rifle-balls were sent after the flying girl.

With a cry almost human, Deerfoot staggered; the blood gushed from his nostrils, and he fell heavily; but, prepared for his fall, Queen alighted upon her feet, and suddenly springing forward, seized the rein of the mustang of the fallen warrior as he was dashing by.

With a bound she was upon his back, and hard upon his sides rained the blows of her keen whip, while in her heart arose hope once more that she could escape.

Queen was a thorough horsewoman, and, in mounting, her father had taught her to always spring to the saddle from the ground; now this accomplishment rendered her good service, for she seated herself securely upon the back of her captured mustang, and urged him on to his utmost speed, which soon began to drop the red-skins behind.

"Bound on, you ugly brute," she cried, almost viciously and then, suddenly changing her tone, she continued:

"Save me, brave horse, and you shall be my pet in the place of poor Deerfoot!"

The mustang appeared almost to comprehend her words, for he put on an extra spurt of speed, and was dropping the red-skins rapidly behind, when they seemed to recover from their astonishment at the bold act of the maiden, and seeing that she was swiftly leaving them they urged their ponies on to greater speed, at the same time firing upon the flying horse ahead of them.

For a few moments the shots proved harmless, and, with white face and set teeth, Queen urged on the straining animal she rode, while each moment hope of escape rose higher in her heart; but, alas for her hopes! A well-aimed shot struck the mustang, and though he struggled on nobly, his telling

pace began to slacken, and once more the red-skins gained on the fugitive.

Slower and slower ran the mustang, and Queen felt him sway under her, as though with weakness, and knew that he must soon go down; but she urged him on, still, straining her eyes in the direction of the fort, in the vain hope that some one might be abroad on the prairie and see her race for more than life.

Suddenly the straining mustang staggered badly, and, drawing him to a halt, Queen sprung to the ground—just in time, for the animal, that had tried so hard to save her, fell dead at her feet.

Instantly the brave girl crouched down behind his dead body, and with revolver presented, awaited the approach of her savage foes.

The next instant the savages dashed up and sprung to the ground, a few yards distant from the girl at bay.

CHAPTER V.

FANCY FRANK.

THE stranger who had so opportunely appeared upon the scene, to the aid of the maiden known as Red Plume, was a remarkable looking personage, and one whom few men would dare to meet in personal combat.

Fully six feet in height, he possessed a form almost womanly in its perfect proportions, and yet it was one that indicated wonderful endurance and leonine strength, while his face was a strange mixture of manly and feminine beauty, for the eyes were large, intensely black, and his hair, falling in curling masses upon his shoulders, and a long, silken mustache and imperial, were golden in hue.

"But, though his eyes seemed soft, and rather sad looking, his mouth indicated indomitable courage and resolution, while his every action proved that he possessed an iron nerve.

Dressed in a full suit of buckskin, the leggings stuck in handsome cavalry boots, armed with spurs, he wore a broad sombrero of a light color, encircled by a gold cord.

At his back hung a Winchester repeating rifle, and in his belt were two revolvers and a long-bladed knife.

Just over a rise of the prairie, patiently awaiting his master, was a dark bay horse, standing where the stranger had left him, when he came upon the scene—a strong man struggling with a young girl.

"Pard, I've the drop on you, so you may as well do as I say; *take your hand off of your pistol!*"

Dick Sanford sullenly obeyed, while he hissed forth:

"I'd like to know where you come from, and why you chip in where you're not wanted?"

"You mistake, sir; I chip in wherever I can help the weaker party, and as to where I come from I will answer you, and throw in my name gratis. Maybe you have heard of me:—I'm called Fancy Frank of Colorado."

Dick Sanford had heard of him, as one of the most daring scouts on the border.

"Yes, I know of you, and I admit freely that you hold the trump card against me; but what are you going to do about it?"

"Simply take this young girl out of your power, and escort her to a place of safety, while I give you the information unasked, that if you persecute her any more I will drive my knife to the hilt in your cowardly heart."

"Ah! she is your friend, then?" sneered Dick Sanford.

"Only that she is in trouble is she my friend. I never saw her before in my life."

Then, turning to the maid, who had most attentively listened to all that had passed, he continued:

"I judge that you do not care to remain longer in the company of this man, miss?"

"Indeed I do not, sir. Why he holds an enmity against me I know not, for I saved his life yesterday and to day he threatened mine."

"Aha! Well, sir, your horse is there; mount and away from here, or I will make a meal of you for the coyotes."

The dark eyes flashed, and the lips compressed, while he motioned to Dick Sanford to depart.

"Curse you, my dandy plainsman, but I'll yet make you repent of interfering in my affairs, and in spite of your threat I have not yet done with that little beauty. We will all meet again."

So saying, he bounded upon his horse, and dashing his spurs viciously into the animal's flanks, disappeared over a roll in the prairie.

"Now, miss, how can I serve you?" and Fancy Frank turned to the maiden.

"By allowing me to go my way alone, sir; but most sincerely do I thank you for the manner in which you have aided me."

Fancy Frank gazed into the beautiful face with surprise at her request to be left alone upon the prairie, and admiration at her wondrous loveliness.

"Did I hear aright? You wish me to leave you alone here upon the plains?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am bearing dispatches to Fort McPherson; you are doubtless from there, and—"

"No, I do not live at the fort, sir, and I must again ask you to leave me, for I see my runaway pony is coming back."

As she spoke, Whalebone came trotting up, looking ashamed at having deserted his young mistress in time of her need.

"You do not live at the fort, and—but I will not pry into that which you do not care to tell me. Allow me to aid you to mount?"

With slight effort of his great strength, he raised the maiden to the back of her mustang, and then stepped aside.

"Good-by. I hope we shall meet again, and I once more thank you," and the Red Plume held forth her tiny, sunburnt hand, which the Scout grasped warmly.

The next instant she was dashing away at a rapid gallop.

"If I had time I would track that beauty to her lair. Where can she live, I wonder? Well, I must hasten on, but I will deliver my dispatches and tomorrow come out and strike her trail, for she is a gem worth the finding. Come, Red Angel!"

The last was called out to his bay horse, that trotted up to his master as obediently as a dog would have done.

Mounting, he set off at an easy canter, heading toward Fort McPherson.

After a ride of several miles he suddenly drew rein, for before him, upon the prairie, lay a dead mustang. Not that a horse lying dead upon the plains was a strange sight, but that he bore a woman's saddle, was what surprised the Scout, and in an instant he was by the side of the animal.

"There has been foul play here. Hal! there leads a trail, and unshod hoofs prove that whoever the unfortunate rider of this horse was, she is in the hands of red-skins! I will follow and see what more I can discover."

Again mounting, he pressed rapidly on, following the plain trail, and soon came to a dead warrior lying upon the ground.

"Strange they did not carry off this dead red-skin, or bury him. They must have been pressed hard by pursuers, and yet, I see only unshod hoof-marks," and the Scout examined the ground closely, then once more resumed his trailing.

Ere very long it brought him upon another dead animal, this time an Indian pony, wearing the trappings of his savage master.

Searching carefully around him he discovered the track of a dainty shoe in the prairie, and a blue vail lay by the side of the dead horse.

"This is strange, for I see no sign of pursuers having been on the trail of the Indians, and the woman was doubtless captured where her horse was killed. No! by the Lord Harry, she ran this far. But, that

was impossible! Ha! I have it! The girl, whoever she was, shot the dead red-skin back yonder on the prairie, after he had killed her horse, and his pony brought her this far. A plucky woman, and one who shall be rescued from the red devils."

Remounting his horse he set off at the same rapid, steady gallop, and continued it but a few hundred yards, when he again drew rein suddenly.

"Aha! Here is the cause of those red-skins running off without carrying their dead comrade with them," and he gazed fixedly at the ground where a broad trail was visible.

"It comes from the eastward, and led toward the fort, until here it branched off in pursuit of the Indians."

"Well, I am glad the woman has friends on her track, though they seem but few in number. Now, old fellow, we must see the fort within two hours," and once more the noble bay steed pressed on at the same untiring pace.

An hour after Fancy Frank rode up to the sentinel at the fort and desired to see General Emory, at the same time announcing himself as the bearer of dispatches.

At a glance he saw that there was some unusual cause of excitement in the fort, and, asking the cause, was told that the Indians had captured the Prairie Queen, as Queen Woodbridge was called by the soldiers, and that a company of cavalry had gone off at daylight on her trail, accompanied by her nearly-crazed father.

The orderly coming that moment to conduct Fancy Frank to the general, he made no reply to the soldier who had given him the information regarding Queen, and entered the quarters of the commandant.

Half an hour after he came out, and remounting his faithful steed, set forth upon the prairie, turning his back upon Fort McPherson.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAILERS.

WHEN Queen Woodbridge crouched down behind the dead Indian pony, she was determined to defend herself to the very last, and her leveled revolver caused her red foes to come to a sudden halt.

"Better white squaw give chief pistol; might hurt white squaw," coaxingly said one of the Indians, who spoke good English and was the chief.

"It will certainly hurt any red-skin who attempts to lay his vile hands upon me!" was the fearless retort.

The Indians did not like this reply. it seemed, and the chief turned to one of his warriors and spoke a few words in his own tongue.

"White squaw much pretty. Prairie Snake want her for squaw."

"I will kill myself first; yes, I would rather trust myself to the mercy of the snakes that seek refuge in yonder prairie-dog dens than to you."

"White squaw change her mind; Prairie Snake great chief—Dog Soldier Sioux—have much good tepee," and the Indian drew himself up with pride.

He was a tall, well-formed savage of thirty, with a strongly marked and intelligent face, now besmeared with paint, and when he had mentioned his name, Queen remembered him as one who was noted as a leader of his people, and was a bitter foe to the whites.

"No, I will not fall alive into your hands; I will kill the first one that comes near me, and then shoot myself," and the white, resolute face indicated that she would be as good as her word.

As she spoke, there came a whirring sound in the air, and Queen felt a sharp blow upon her shoulders.

The next instant the noose of a lariat settled down over her arms, pinioning them to her side and jerking the revolver from her grasp.

With a yell of joy, Prairie Snake sprung forward and seized her in his strong arms, while, overcome at her capture, the poor girl swooned away.

So rejoiced were the Indians at the prize they had taken, they failed to observe the approach of half a dozen horsemen until, with loud yells, they charged down upon the red band.

To mount their horses, and for Prairie Snake to take Queen in his strong arms before him, was the work of an instant, and away over the prairie sped the red-skins, their pursuers pressing hard on in pursuit.

Now and then the Indians would halt, as if to engage in combat; but the long-range and repeating rifles of their foes would soon put them to flight once more, and they pushed them harder, as night came on, not wishing to lose sight of them in the darkness.

As soon as it was dark, Prairie Snake resorted to Indian cunning to escape.

Queen had recovered consciousness, and knowing her utter inability to escape, and seeing that there were pursuers upon the trail of the Indians, she remained perfectly quiet, while her savage captor held her in his powerful grasp, and he began to hope that she would be contented with her lot.

But, it was hard, indeed, for Queen to see the cunning plot entered into to throw her friends off the trail, for, with a few of his braves, Prairie Snake rode on ahead, at the utmost speed of their horses, and the act was not observed in the darkness by the pursuers.

Then, when the chief and his few followers had gained a safe distance ahead, the rear guard suddenly scattered in as many different directions as there were braves, and not wishing to divide their small force, the pursuers were necessarily brought to a sudden halt, for they knew not which of the Indians carried the captive girl.

"I tell yer, pards, thet durned ole Snake hev tricked us, an' no mistake, an' thar's but one thing fer us ter do," said John Nelson, an old trapper, and who had lived for years among the Indians, and was called by them Chashachaopogeo (Red-willow-fill-the-pipe).

"And what is that, guide?" asked the youngest one of the party, and who was a very different man from his companions—in fact, he seemed hardly more than a youth of twenty, and a very handsome one at that.

His hair was long, light-brown, and fell upon the collar of his velvet coat; his mustache, the same color as his hair, was turned up at the ends, and every feature of his face was perfect, though effeminate.

Under the medium hight, his form was slender, yet denoted activity and strength. He wore a loose velvet sack coat, brown corduroy pants, stuck in top boots, a wide-brimmed, black felt hat, and under his coat a belt of arms around his waist, while a Winchester repeating rifle hung at his saddle-born.

He was well mounted and thoroughly equipped, yet seemed out of place there on the border, the companion of rude frontiersmen.

His comrades were all old trappers, men well known upon the plains, and who lived together upon the Republican and its tributaries, gaining their living by trapping and the chase.

Besides Jack Nelson, who seemed to be the leader, there were Hank and Monte Clifford, Arthur Ruff, and Andy Barrett, the latter a strange character dwelling alone upon the Medicine and known as a snake-charmer and queer genius in general.

A few days before the party are presented to the reader, Roy Reese, as the young man called himself, had been *en route* to Fort McPherson, accompanied by two guides who had come with him from Kansas.

Just after crossing the Republican, the three had been fired upon by the Indians and his two comrades fell dead from their horses, and Roy Reese would doubtless have shared a like fate, had he not, in his flight, come suddenly upon Andy Barrett, who led him to the Red Willow, where Jack Nelson and his comrades were then encamped.

A few days' rest at the rude camp of the trappers, and the party set off to accompany Roy Reese to Fort McPherson, he offering to pay liberally for their services.

It was when near the fort that they came suddenly upon the strange sight of a young girl at bay before nearly a score of savage warriors.

"Boys, we must take a hand in the little game, though they have the dead wood on us in numbers," said Nelson, quietly.

"You bet I'm the man as will help yer tackle 'em," replied Hank Clifford.

"An' you'll hev a hand in too, pard, won't yer?" asked Andy Barrett of Roy Reese.

"I would be less than human not to aid a poor girl in distress," was the prompt reply; and with loud yells the party charged down upon the surprised red-skins, just as they had secured poor Queen.

But, when the cunning of Prairie Snake had foiled the little band of pursuers shortly after dark, there was but one thing for them to do, and answering the question of Roy Reese as to what that was, Jack Nelson replied:

"Fer us ter camp on the trail till mornin', an' then press on; but in the meantime fer one o' us ter skoot ter the fort, an' tell as how a young gal was in the claws o' the red-skins, durn 'em."

"I'll jist skip off at onst, an' I guesses it won't be long afore I jine you ag'in with a company o' sogers," said Hank Clifford, and a moment after he was riding rapidly away in the direction of the fort, while the remainder of the party sought the shelter of some timber on the banks of a small stream and went into camp.

True to his word, Hank Clifford returned the following morning, accompanied by a company of cavalry under a dashing young officer, who was determined to rescue Queen Woodbridge.

Louis Woodbridge, the almost heart-broken and despairing father, came with the troopers also, and all felt for him the deepest commiseration.

With the light of day the trappers saw plainly how cleverly Prairie Snake had eluded them, and they knew that the large trail was the one by which the maiden had been carried, and the whole party at once set off in pursuit.

With such trailers as John Nelson and his companions there was no difficulty in following the trail, and at a fast trot they pushed on for several hours, when they halted for a short time, only to resume the pursuit as soon as men and animals had enjoyed a few moments' rest.

The trail now became interspersed with numerous others, that joined it on the left, until all knew that they would have a large force to fight, as Prairie Snake had doubtless been joined by numerous other Indians; but, undaunted, the party pushed on until the trappers asserted the red-skins were not five miles in advance.

Suddenly a party of horsemen dashed out of a motte of cottonwoods on their left, and with cheers they were greeted, for they were recognized as the gallant men of their own regiment, the Fifth Cavalry, and at their head rode Captain Alf Taylor and Lieutenant Burr Riley!

A halt was at once called and the pursuers of Prairie Snake learned of the defeat of Old Whistler and his band and the rescue of Lieutenant Rockwell and his men.

"And we are in hot pursuit of them now," said Captain Taylor.

"Then we will unite forces for, Taylor, we must rescue the Prairie Queen," said the young officer in command of the troopers, who had been trailing Prairie Snake.

"By all means; let us now decide as to what is best to be done. Nelson, where do you think the red-skins are heading?"

"To the mouth of Frenchman's Fork, cap'n; thar's heavy timber beyond, an' the natur' of the kentry jist sich as Injuns likes to fight in. We'll

find 'em thar, ef we shouldn't come up with 'em afore."

"Do you think that we can overtake them, Nelson?"

"That thar depen's, cap'n. Ef they stops fer us I guesses as how we can."

"Why would they stop for us?"

"They is sly, them Injuns is, an' Old Whistler an' Prairie Snake is more cunnin' than sarpints, an' they mou't lay low in a good place to drop on us as we go by."

"Ambush us, you mean?"

"That's jist what I mean, Cap'n Taylor."

"Then what would you advise, Nelson?"

"My idee would be to branch off from the trail and strike the Frenchman's Fork some miles above whar it empties inter the Republican; then we can cross over an' kinder take the devils in the flank."

"But are you certain that they will make for the timber-lands beyond the Republican?"

"I is sart'in they is goin' whar they kin stan' yer off in a squar' fight, cap'n, an' that thar kentry is the place fer 'em ter do it."

A consultation of the officers was at once held, Louis Woodbridge and the scouts being present, as was also Roy Reese.

Then it was finally agreed that that they would go into camp where they were until night, and give both men and horses a chance to rest, and, as they were to strike a straight trail for the Frenchman's Fork, to push ahead soon after dark and travel through the night.

This decision made, the guards were stationed, the horses lariatied out, and the men threw themselves down upon their blankets to rest; but there was no rest for Louis Woodbridge while his daughter was in the hands of a cruel foe, and he paced to and fro with bent head and compressed lips, the minutes dragging along like hours to him.

Suddenly a horseman was seen coming far off upon the prairie, his horse at an easy trot, and the rider's head bent over, as he carefully scanned the trail of the troopers which he was following.

Who he was none present seemed to know; but, as he drew nearer, his splendid appearance drew exclamations of admiration from the soldiers who, one by one, sprung from their blankets to see him.

As he approached the camp, which he had some time before discovered, he urged his horse into a swift canter, and drew rein just at the edge of the timber.

"I seek Lieutenant Forbush," he said, quietly, and the last rays of the setting sun falling full upon him, revealed the handsome face and superb form of Fancy Frank of Colorado.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVIL SPIRIT.

"My name is Forbush, sir," and Lieutenant Forbush stepped forward and confronted Fancy Frank, who saluted politely, and placed a letter in his hands.

The young lieutenant glanced at the letter, and then up at the face of the Scout.

"You are the man known as Fancy Frank, I see by this letter?"

"I am so called on the border, sir; but my name is Frank Barbour."

"I have often heard of you, Mr. Barbour, and am glad to meet you; but, how you are going to rescue Miss Woodbridge alone, I am certainly at a loss to know; still, General Emory shall be obeyed," and the lieutenant placed the letter in the hands of Captain Taylor, who read it with some surprise, and then said:

"General Emory requests, I see, Forbush, that you go into camp and await the result of the Scout's visit to the Indian camp. If he fails to gain possession of her, you can then act as you deem best."

"Yes, and I am glad that our forces are consolidated; perhaps if General Emory knew this he would wish us to push right on to the attack."

"Gentleman, pardon me, but if it is your desire to rescue the young lady alive, you had better allow me to first make the attempt; if I fail, it will be time for you to avenge her, for I know Old Whistler and Prairie Snake too well to believe that they would let you have her alive.

"After a few hours' rest I will push on to the Indian camp, and you can follow, slowly. If I do not return to you within two days, then you can act as you think best."

Both Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Forbush were deeply impressed with the Scout, and at once offered him the hospitality of their camp, which he accepted.

Having gained a few hours' rest, Fancy Frank mounted his horse and rode out of camp, upon his perilous duty of endeavoring, single-handed, to rescue a captive from a large band of Indians; but, as he disappeared in the gloom, all who had seen him, felt impressed with the thought that if man could save Queen Woodbridge, that man was the daring Scout from Colorado, and the heart of the poor father beat high with hope.

With the first glimmer of light in the east, Captain Taylor broke camp and started upon the trail of the Scout, Nelson, the trapper following it without any hesitation, and pressing swiftly on, for, with Fancy Frank ahead of them, no one seemed to dread an ambush now.

After some hours' march the bank of the Frenchman's Fork was reached, and, according to his agreement with the Scout, Captain Taylor went into camp.

Meantime, Fancy Frank, with a caution born of long years upon the wild border, followed the trail of the savages in the darkness, but more by the instinct of his noble horse, than any trace he could find of them.

Pushing straight ahead, neither turning aside for streams or hills, he crossed the Republican after daylight, at the same crossing used by the Indians, and pushed on toward the thick wood.

As he advanced, he saw that the Indians now deemed themselves safe from pursuit, for their trail was a straggling one, and in an hour more he was brought to a sudden halt by the whiz of an arrow by his head.

Instantly his rifle sprung to his shoulder, and down went the savage who had fired upon him.

Drawing rein by the side of the dead red-skin, Fancy Frank dismounted and raised him to the back of his horse, after which he again mounted, and, turning off from the trail, he sought a canyon, where he quickly transferred the Indian's gorgeous head-dress of feathers to his own head, and, with paint taken from his saddle-pocket, he stained his face brown.

Then leaving the dead warrior lying in the canyon, he sprung into the saddle, and arranging the red-skin's blanket across his knees, so as to hide his pants and boots, he galloped on toward the spot where he knew the village was situated.

A ride of several miles brought the Scout to the heavily-wooded hill-land, and in a valley, well guarded by nature, the Indian village was situated.

Here and there the Scout beheld warriors, mounted and on foot, but he gave them as wide a berth as was possible, and pressed on into the village, not once awakening in their minds that he was other than he appeared at a casual glance—a red-skin brave.

Dashing up through the village, he held his way toward the center, where stood the grand Medicine Lodge of the tribe, and, just as the Indians began to notice his elegant horse, and that something was wrong in his appearance, he sprung from his saddle and stood at the entrance to the large *tepees*, while he cried, in the Sioux tongue:

"The Evil Spirit would see the great Medicine Chief!"

All knew that terrible name, for his daring acts and wonderful escapes had caused the Indians to

call the Scout Evil Spirit, and they feared him as a being hardly human.

At once was the village a scene of the wildest excitement, and warriors, squaws and children rushed toward the Medicine Lodge, where, having thrown aside his Indian trappings, and replaced his broad hat, Fancy Frank stood apparently unconcerned, gazing upon the tumultuous crowd, his horse by his side, and his weapons ready for instant use.

Presently a tall chief, stately, with the silver threads mingling with his long black hair, approached and said, sternly:

"Why has the bold pale face come? Does he deem himself a spirit that the arrows and rifles of my braves cannot harm him?"

"The Evil Spirit has come to see his red father, the great Medicine Chief, White Wolf. Have the eyes of my red father grown dim that he forgets the face of the Boy Chief?"

"No; the White Wolf remembers; it is many moons since the Boy Chief was in the village of the Sioux; he is welcome."

"Yes, the Boy Chief left the village of his red brothers many moons ago; he has become a man since, for he has lived among the pale-faces—his own people."

The Medicine Chief seemed suddenly struck with a disagreeable thought, and he asked quickly:

"The Boy Chief left his red brothers and became their foe; his deeds have gained him the name of the Evil Spirit; why are his hands red with the blood of my people?"

A murmur of approbation at the question went up from the crowd around.

"The Evil Spirit is no red-skin; his face is white, and he went back to his people, and when they went on the trail of the Sioux warriors he was with them. Would the Medicine Chief, White Wolf, have him turn his rifle against his own people?"

"The Boy Chief had become one of my people!"

"Yes, until he could leave them. He has not forgotten that you went to the home of his father and left it in ruins, and killed those that were dear to him; nor has he forgotten that you saved his life, boy though he was, and brought him up as a red-skin. He thanks the White Wolf for it, but he preferred to live among his own people, and he left the village of the Medicine Chief."

"He went on the war-path after my young men!" angrily said the White Wolf.

"Your young men unburied the hatchet, and the Evil Spirit met them on the war-path."

"The Evil Spirit has at his feet the dress of one of my warriors."

"True; it served him as a disguise to reach the Medicine Lodge."

"Where is the Sioux warrior?"

"He fired upon the Evil Spirit; go ask the coyotes!" was the defiant reply, and a yell of rage broke from the infuriated Indians; but the White Wolf motioned for silence, and in his deep tones continued:

"The Evil Spirit enters the village of my people with the blood of my braves red on his hands; why has he come?"

"He has come to ask the great Medicine Chief for the maiden that the Prairie Snake has stolen from her people."

"Where is the pale-face maiden?"

"Would the White Wolf try to deceive the Evil Spirit? The maiden is in his village."

"Let her be brought here," was the order, and the chief, Prairie Snake, stepped from the crowd, and replied:

"The Medicine Chief has not spoken well; the pale-face maiden is the prize of the Prairie Snake."

"Let her be brought to the Medicine Lodge," was the stern reply; and a moment after Queen Woodbridge, deadly pale, with sunken eyes and tottering steps, approached through the crowd.

"Cheer up, Miss Woodbridge; there is hope for you," boldly said Fancy Frank.

Queen started; her face flushed with joy; and in tones almost inaudible she cried, as her eyes fell upon the fearless Scout:

"Oh, you have come to save me!"

"I will do all that I can; if I leave the village without you, be surprised at nothing that may happen, and keep up your strength."

"God bless you! I will trust you," was the earnest reply, and she stepped back as the Prairie Snake approached her.

"Where did the chief get the captive maiden?" and the White Wolf turned to the Prairie Snake.

"He ran her down with his warriors, like a deer on the prairie! The Prairie Snake has the heart of a squaw to make war on a defenseless girl," was the sneering remark of Fancy Frank, and the Indian, with a savage yell, sprung toward him.

But the Medicine Chief stepped between them, and said sternly:

"Let the Prairie Snake beware! He stands in the shelter of the Medicine Lodge."

The Indian fell back a few steps, and the White Wolf continued:

"What would the Evil Spirit with the pale-face maiden?"

"He would restore her to her people."

"Does the Evil Spirit expect that the White Wolf can do this he asks?"

"Yes; the White Wolf is all-powerful."

"The White Wolf cannot; the maiden must remain and in one moon become the squaw of the Prairie Snake."

"Never! I would kill her with my own hand first," cried Fancy Frank; but checking himself quickly, he continued:

"Has the Medicine Chief forgotten that many moons ago the Boy Chief saved his red brothers from death? Has he forgotten that the Boy Chief saved the life of the White Wolf?"

"The White Wolf remembers all," sadly said the chief.

"Then let him grant the request the Boy Chief makes of him."

"No; the Evil Spirit can go from the village, but he will die if ever he comes here again; the pale-face maiden must remain."

Fancy Frank gazed into the face of the White Wolf and knew that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TREBLE DUEL.

For some moments after the reply of the White Wolf, a silence rested upon all; then the old chief said again:

"The White Wolf has spoken; the trail from my village is open; let the Evil Spirit take it!"

Queen gave an almost despairing glance into the face of the man from whom she hoped for more than life, and seeing it, Fancy Frank determined to make one more effort at a rescue, and said quickly:

"The White Wolf has many great braves in his village; let him say which ones the Evil Spirit shall fight; if he kills them, the maiden goes with him from the village."

"No, no, no; you have already risked too much for me; leave me to my fate," cried Queen, horrified at the proposal of Fancy Frank.

But in the eyes of the Indians the proposition seemed to meet with general favor, and the White Wolf, seemingly anxious to serve the Scout, or perhaps more anxious to get him out of the way by death, said quickly:

"The Evil Spirit is a great brave; how many of my warriors would he meet?"

"There stands the Scalper, with a repeating-rifle he has taken from some poor scout or soldier he has killed; let him stand an arrow's flight away, and we will run upon each other firing."

"It is good; but, will the Evil Spirit meet no more

of my braves? The pale-face maiden is beautiful," slyly said the White Wolf.

"Yes, one by one I would fight your whole tribe to save her," broke from Fancy Frank's lips in English; but he added calmly in the Sioux tongue:

"Yes, the Red Bear has a revolver; we will stand a knife's throw from each other and advance firing."

"Good! The Scalper and the Red Bear are great warriors; but there is another who is greater."

"Oh, I'm coming to him, 'O'd Greedy,'" muttered Fancy Frank, and aloud he said:

"The Prairie Snake; he has no equal as a great brave; he wears a knife; let him meet me with it."

"Good! but what other brave would the Evil Spirit meet?"

"Does the White Wolf want his whole tribe killed?" defiantly answered Fancy Frank, and ere the chief could reply, he continued:

"The Scalper, Red Bear and Prairie Snake are the greatest braves of the Sioux nation; if the Evil Spirit meets and conquers them is it not enough?"

The Medicine Chief, and in fact all others, seemed to see the logic of this reasoning, and with glad hearts at the thought that the hated Evil Spirit was at last to meet his doom, the Indians formed a line to see the fun.

As for poor Queen she was bowed down in sorrow, for, understanding the Sioux tongue a little, she had a knowledge of what desperate chances the daring Scout was taking.

A year before, when at Denver, Colorado, she had seen in the streets the man who had come so boldly to her rescue, and, greatly impressed by his striking appearance, she had asked questions regarding him and learned of his many daring acts; but, other than that he had lived a long time among the Indians, and was now their bitterest foe, she could learn nothing of his history.

Now, this daring Scout, whose love of dress had gained him the name of Fancy Frank among his comrades, and whose wonderful deeds and deadly aim had caused the Indians to call him Evil Spirit, was in the midst of his foes, taking terrible chances to save her from a fearful fate.

"Oh, sir, do not, I implore you, risk your life as you have offered to do, but give me a pistol and I will end my own misery and save your life, for you cannot defeat those three terrible savages."

Queen had approached Fancy Frank and looked earnestly up into his face.

He smiled pleasantly, and said, in a low tone:

"Have no fear; my good fortune will not desert me in such anoble cause. Your friends, the soldiers, are not far away, and if I fall they will attack the camp. Now I must get ready to send old Scalper to the happy hunting-grounds."

With a bow he left her, and with staring eyes she stood gazing after him, and saw him take his stand about a hundred yards from where stood the Scalper rifle in hand.

At a motion from White Wolf, the two raised their rifles; the Scalper fired, and Fancy Frank dropped on his knee, while a yell burst from the Indians—a yell of fiendish joy; but from the heart of Queen Woodbridge came a groan of agony.

With a shout of fiendish triumph, the Scalper rushed forward, firing his repeating-rifle as he advanced; but hardly had he advanced half a dozen steps, when Fancy Frank fired, and down dropped the red-skin, dead in his tracks.

A wail of woe went up from hundreds of throats, and it was hard for Queen to keep back a cry of joy.

Rising to his feet, it was evident that Fancy Frank had been hit, for he limped slightly as he walked toward his dead foe.

Bending over him, he very coolly raised his scalp, and fastening it to his belt, turned toward White Wolf amid a series of wails from the squaws.

"The Evil Spirit is ready to meet the Red Bear," said Fancy Frank in a loud voice, and the warrior named stepped nimbly into position.

He held confidence in his own true aim, for the revolver was his favorite weapon, and he showed no dread of the terrible foe he was to meet.

Again did the staring eyes of Queen Woodbridge turn upon Fancy Frank as he took his position about fifteen paces from Red Bear; she did not see the motion of White Wolf to begin the revolver-duel; she only heard two quick shots, and then her hands went together in glee.

"God forgive me! I am applauding the death of a human being," she exclaimed suddenly, as she watched Fancy Frank, still limping, approach the fallen body of Red Bear, and bend over it, a scalping-knife in hand.

Covering her face with her hands, she shuddered, as a long, deep wail, that ended in a howl, went up from the crowd of Indians.

Again did Fancy Frank approach old White Wolf, and his words all heard:

"If the Prairie Snake is not a coward, I am ready to meet him!"

The Prairie Snake, though a cruel wretch, was certainly no coward, and notwithstanding the fate of his two brother warriors, he seemed anxious to meet the Scout and try his nerve and strength in a combat for life.

Eagerly the Indians crowded around and a circle was formed, shutting out the tall form of Fancy Frank from the view of Queen, who sunk upon the ground, dreading the third meeting more than she had the others.

In a very few minutes the two men were ready for the fight, the Scout having thrown aside all useless attire, and the Indian stripping to his leggins and moccasins, leaving his brawny chest bare.

The eyes of Fancy Frank blazed like fire, but his face was very pale, and the left leggin, just above the knee, was stained with blood, from the rifle-shot of the Scalper, and his hunting shirt also had a stain upon it, under the right arm, where the revolver-bullet of Red Bear had cut its way.

Still, wounded though he was, Fancy Frank stood up unflinchingly before the Prairie Snake ready for the fray.

At a signal given by White Wolf the combat began by Prairie Snake springing quickly toward the Scout, with a fearful lunge.

But the knife-blow was skillfully caught and parried, and at once a desperate battle began, the knives clashing viciously, and occasionally giving a wound.

At length Fancy Frank, determined to end the combat at once, rushed in under the guard of Prairie Snake, seized him in his strong arms, and, with a power that seemed superhuman, bent him backward until the brave savage groaned with pain.

Then the long blade of the Scout came down with telling force, and deep into the red breast of the red-skin it sunk.

Instantly the bronzed arms relaxed their hold, the knife dropped from the hand, and Prairie Snake was dead.

Quickly, and unmindful of the yelling around him, Fancy Frank scalped his enemy; then resuming his outer clothing, he stepped in front of the Medicine Chief, who seemed horrified at the result.

"The White Wolf has seen; the pale-face maiden goes with the Evil Spirit," said the Scout, boldly.

"The White Wolf has seen; the Evil Spirit is a mighty chief; let him take the pale-face maiden and depart from my village; if he comes again, he shall die."

Fancy Frank was only too glad to obey, and he went toward Queen Woodbridge, who lay limp and motionless in a heap upon the ground.

At first he believed that some Indian squaw had slain her; but raising her up he saw that she had only fainted, and he handed her to the White Wolf while he called his horse to his side and sprung into the saddle.

Then he took Queen from the chief's arms and

turned his horse's head from the village, for he saw that the Indians were at a fever-heat of rage, and were howling for his life.

But White Wolf waved them back, and at a rapid gallop Fancy Frank left the village behind him, his splendid horse caring little for his double load.

After a ride of half a mile Queen regained her consciousness, and her eyes fell upon the Scout's face so near her own, and she knew that she was saved.

"Oh, sir, what do I not owe you!" she cried, while the tears dimmed her beautiful eyes.

"We will not speak of gratitude now, Miss Woodbridge, for we have a bad lot behind us. With your permission, I will give you a more comfortable seat," and he swung her round to a seat back of his saddle.

"Now hold to my belt hard, please, for I intend to let the Red Angel show his speed for a few miles," and he urged Red Angel into a rapid gallop.

One, two, three miles were cast behind by the noble horse, and then, as they entered a narrow gulch between two wooded hills, Queen saw the Scout lurch suddenly forward, and then fall heavily from his saddle.

In an instant she sprung down beside him in terrible terror; was he dead, or had he fainted from loss of blood from his wounds?

Which, Queen could hardly tell, and with a cry of anguish she laid one hand upon his heart, the fear in her mind that he was dead—that he had lost his life to save her, and that she was alone in the wilderness with the dead.

It was a horrible thought, and she bowed her head and wept bitter, scalding tears.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPECTRAL VISITOR.

For twenty-four hours had the troopers been in camp, and yet no word came from the Scout.

Captain Taylor seemed to feel uneasy, although the time appointed by Fancy Frank had not yet elapsed, and Mr. Woodbridge could only pace to and fro, his head bent down, his hands clasped and his whole manner that of a despairing man.

Again night settled upon the scene, and the soldiers gathered around the camp-fires, for the nights were getting chilly, still no laughter or songs were heard, and the gloom of death seemed to rest upon all.

A new moon, only a few days old, was descending toward the horizon, and the deep silence amid the timber, with only an occasional howl of a prowling wolf out upon the prairies, seemed to impress officers and men alike.

Suddenly a startled cry came from the sentinel at the edge of the timber, and instantly every man was on the alert, while Captain Taylor and Louis Woodbridge at once went toward the guard.

"What is it, Benton?" asked the captain, approaching the spot where the sentinel stood.

The answer of the trooper was to silently point out over the prairie.

There, in the light of the moon, a horse and a rider were visible; but were they of the earth earthly? was almost the first thought of every man whose eyes fell upon them.

The steed was snow-white, and with head erect came on a slow gallop his hoofs making no sound as they fell.

His rider appeared to be a woman, and was dressed in snow-white; what could it mean?

Nearer and nearer came the horse, swiftly, yet silently, and in the shadows of the cottonwoods officers and men stood watching its approach, not one able to account for what appeared to them as an apparition.

When within a hundred yards of the timber, the horse suddenly stopped, and then approached once more; but this time at a walk.

Nearer and nearer until within fifty yards of the timber, the troopers staring at the ghostly forms.

Then again the steed halted, and the arms of the rider seemed to move strangely; but the next instant the movement was accounted for, as there came the whiz of an arrow that buried itself in a huge tree not a yard from where Captain Taylor stood.

Instantly all was excitement, and to the right-about wheeled the horse and away he darted across the prairie.

"Forbush, take a dozen men and pursue! Ha! there is a note attached to this arrow!" and Captain Taylor broke the thread that bound a small piece of paper, closely folded, to the arrow.

Instantly he retraced his way to the firelight and read, with intense surprise what was written upon the paper.

"It is Miss Queen's writing, as I live!" cried Captain Taylor, who had often seen that young lady's specimens of penmanship upon notes thanking him for some little souvenir sent to her.

"Queen's writing! Thank God she yet lives! Read it, captain, for I cannot," cried Louis Woodbridge almost overcome with emotion.

The note was addressed to the officer in command of the troops, encamped upon the Frenchman's Fork, and the contents were as follows, written in Queen's well known bold hand:

"SIR:— Knowing that you have come thus far to effect my rescue, I write to say that I am in a place of perfect safety, having been rescued by the Scout, known as Fancy Frank, from the Indians.

"More I cannot say, but I will return to the fort as soon as a certain duty that detains me here permits me to leave.

"I am comfortably situated and well, please say to my father, and ere long hope to see him.

"For your benefit I will say that the Indians under the Medicine Chief, White Wolf, are at their village in the hills beyond the Republican, and their force is very large, being fully five hundred warriors, while the village of the Dog-Soldier Sioux under Old Whistler and the Cheyenne bands of Medicine Bear and Two Lance are not very far away, so it would be madness to attack them, and I beg that you return at once to the fort.

"Thanking you for your services in my behalf, and again assuring you of my perfect safety, I remain, with respect,

QUEEN WOODBRIDGE."

Captain Taylor read this strange communication aloud, and when he had finished, all looked at each other in surprise.

"Thank God, my daughter is safe; but why this secrecy as to where she is?" cried Louis Woodbridge.

"I certainly cannot tell; but I congratulate you, Woodbridge, upon your good news; but, where Miss Queen can be, I certainly cannot imagine," said Captain Taylor.

"Cap'n, I'll bet I kin say a word as to this mystery."

It was John Nelson that spoke, and all turned toward him.

"Well, Nelson, what is it?" asked Captain Taylor.

"The Scout you all know as Fancy Frank, and I admit he are a screamer, too, has levanted with ther gal out o' ther Ingin camp, that are sart'in; but he has ter lay low fer a while until he can git her back ter ther fort, an' it's my hopinion that she is in pleasant quarters."

"But what pleasant quarters can he find on the Republican, Nelson, short of Western Kansas?" asked Alf Taylor.

"I ain't sayin' as he's livin' in a palice, cap'n, but I does remark that he an' the gal is well fixt, an' thar is no use bein' oneasy about 'em, fer they will turn up right side with care."

"I believe you have an idea of where they are, and if you know, Nelson, for the sake of poor Mr. Woodbridge, I think you should tell."

"I believe you is right, cap'n; I has an idee, yet

idees ain't allers facts, ye know; but I'll sav what I has to say; you hez heerd o' ther Trapper Hermit?"

"Yes, I have heard of such a character."

"Waal, he's got a home, or ranch, or dug-out on ther Republican."

"Ah! and you know where this home is?"

"Nary; no more'n I do whar He'vein is; it's up above ther stars, the parsons say, an' ther t-ail thar is onpossible hard to find, they puts it, an' so knowin', I guess I'll never strike it; but thet's ther way I knows about ther dug-out o' ther Trapper Hermit—it's on ther Republican, an' thar's no man heur, I kin gamble on it, thet knows more about it; ther man as c'u'd guide us thar, 'ceptin' ther Hermit, I guesses is thar now."

"And that man is—"

"Fancy Frank o' Colorado."

"But the messenger, Nelson—the one who brought this note?"

"Waal, as ter who she mou't be, I ain't able ter tell; thar is strange doin's at times on ther Republican, an' it mou't be a spook or sperrit willin' ter aid a angel, 'kase Miss Queen are a angel, I'll gamble on it."

Just then the sound of hoof-strokes was heard, and into the timber rode Lieutenant Forbush and his troopers.

"No use, Captain Taylor; the white horse ran away from us with perfect ease, and seeing my inability to capture the phantom, I returned."

"You did right, Forbush; read this letter," and the captain placed Queen's letter in his hands.

"Well, I suppose we can do no more. How do you feel about it, Mr. Woodbridge?" and the lieutenant turned to the trader.

"I cannot doubt the evidence of my daughter's writing, and I feel that she is in safety, yet can but have anxiety on her account. What the mystery is, God only knows, but I will wait, as patiently as I can, other tidings."

"Captain, I suppose you will now return to the fort?"

"Yes, I see nothing else to do; we will start at daybreak," and all departed to seek what rest they could.

But little sleep came to their eyes, for all were impressed by the strange letter, and far more so by the ghostly messenger, and at the first streak of light a number were out upon the prairie looking for the trail left by the white horse.

Among the searchers was Jack Nelson, and his remark was echoed by many others of the superstitious bordermen and soldiers:

"Durned ef thet wa'n't a sperrit las' night, or I are a liar."

The cause of this remark was that *no trail could be found.*

CHAPTER X.

ROY REESE STARTS ON A DOUBLE TRAIL.

"WELL, boss, you is safe in ther fort now, an' I guesses as us boys will levant fer ther para-ries ag'in."

It was Jack Nelson who spoke, and he addressed the young man known as Roy Reese, the day of their arrival at Fort McPherson.

"I must ask you to remain until I have had an interview with General Emory, my good friend, for I may also leave the fort; it depends upon what I learn from him, and if I do, I wish you and your comrades to accompany me, for I will pay most liberally for your services," said Reese.

"Which way, boss, w'u'd yer trail, mou't I ask?"

"That I cannot yet tell."

"Waal, ef yer w'u'd be willin' fer us ter fu'st return to ther Republican, we'd go with yer. You see we has got what we comed here for, powder an' sich like, an' we has detarmined to return an' look up thet onnateral thing we see thet night; it's kinder excited my cur'os'ty, an' I has more'n any gal; so yer see we wishes ter fu'st dive inter thet mysteery."

"Would you and your comrades go alone so near the Indian camp?"

"You bet, pard! We hain't a bit skeery o' redskins; we hes lived so long amongst 'em we kinder knows all about the'r doin's."

"Well, I will go with you to the Republican, if I can have your services after that."

"It's a barg'in, my han'some pard."

"The general would see you, sir," and an orderly approached Roy Reese, who followed him to the commandant's quarters.

"Mr. Reese, I believe?" said General Emory, politely, struck with the handsome youth.

"Yes, sir, and I begged to see you, General Emory, upon a matter that you can perhaps give me some information."

"Be seated, sir. Captain Taylor tells me you had a narrow escape from the Indians?"

"Yes, sir; my guides were killed, and I would have doubtless lost my life, had I not come upon some trappers who live upon the Medicine."

"I know them, sir; brave fellows all of them, yet as fond of a wild life as the Indians. You were fortunate to meet them, and it was just like them to give chase to the red captors of Miss Woodbridge. A strange letter that from her, Mr. Reese," and General Emory referred to the letter which he held in his hand.

"Strange, indeed, sir; can you account for it?"

"I have a number of theories; but the one advanced by Nelson, the trapper, is, I think, the best, for Miss Woodbridge is certainly in safe quarters, or she would never have written what she has."

"It is strange that she was alone upon the prairie at the time of her capture."

"Strange indeed, and rumor has it that she went forth to overtake a worthless fellow whom I had pardoned, on account of a service rendered me by one who asked his life at my hands."

"Women are strange creatures, General Emory; they frequently love those who are wholly unworthy of them; but it is of just such a character as the one of whom you speak that I wished to inquire about."

"Any information I can give you, Mr. Reese, it will be a pleasure to me to give."

"Thank you, sir. For nearly five years I have been on the track of a man I am determined to find, for I do not believe he will die until I meet him face to face."

General Emory almost started at the earnest, almost savage manner of the young man, who, at once controlling himself, resumed calmly:

"He is said to have been last seen on the border, and I have tracked him as far as Topeka, Kansas, where I learned he had enlisted as a soldier."

"Believing that he had changed his name I have visited the different forts, and now visit here, hoping you can give me some information regarding him."

"What is his name, Mr. Reese?"

"Richard Sanford."

"By Jupiter! It is the very man of whom I spoke a while since."

"Then he is in your command?" almost joyously cried Roy Reese, springing to his feet, and his face flushing.

"He was, Mr. Reese."

"Was? then he has left the fort?" and Roy Reese sunk back in his chair, an expression of dire disappointment upon his handsome face.

"Yes, he left the fort several days ago."

"I know not, Mr. Reese, how you are interested in this man, but I will tell you what I know of him."

"He enlisted in the army, nine years ago, on the Kansas border, and a better soldier I never saw; but when not on duty he was a very devil, and his recklessness caused him to be continually reprimanded, and at last he went a step too far and deliberately killed a brother soldier, and a court-martial condemned him to death for it."

"But he did not die, you say?" eagerly asked Reese.

"No, he was released, as I said, two days before the day appointed for his death. I banished him from all the forts on this border, and he rode forth upon the prairie alone."

"And a woman, you said, gained his freedom?"

"Yes, or rather a mere girl; a strange and beautiful young creature, whom the scouts and trappers report having occasionally seen upon the prairies, but of whom nothing whatever is known."

"She came to me, told of one of my young officers and his men in deadly peril, and, upon condition only that I would set Dick Sanford free, did she offer to guide a relief force to the lieutenant, where he was besieged by Indians."

"I released Sanford, and the girl kept her word and saved Rockwell and his men, for they certainly would have been massacred, had not Captain Taylor arrived as he did."

"And the girl?"

"Left the command most mysteriously, as soon as she had kept her word."

"And nothing more is known of her?" continued Reese, anxiously.

"Yes, a scout from Colorado, known as Fancy Frank, and whose daring deeds have come to us here, arrived with dispatches for me, and he reports having come upon the Red Plume, as the girl is called, struggling with the same fellow, Dick Sanford."

"Well?" eagerly asked the young man, as the general paused.

"Well, Fancy Frank rescued the girl from the villain's clutches, and he rode away upon the prairie, leaving the Scout and the maiden together; but she would not allow him to follow her, and thanking him for his service rendered her, dashed away, while he came on here with his dispatches, and almost immediately departed to aid in the rescue of Miss Woodbridge."

"There seems some strange mystery in all this; but why Richard Sanford should turn against the girl who had saved him from an ignominious death, I cannot understand."

"Nor can I; but his was a strange nature. I thank you, General Emory, for your kindness; now, I must leave the fort, for I wish to continue on the trail of Dick Sanford."

"I had hoped you would remain at the fort for a few days; but you must not go alone."

"Nor will I, sir, as Nelson, the trapper, and his comrades accompany me; but, did the Scout say where it was that he came upon Sanford and the girl?"

"Yes; not far from where the trail of General Carr crosses the Red Willow; the trappers can easily find it."

"Then they can trail both Dick Sanford and this mysterious girl," said Roy Reese, and taking leave of General Emory, an hour after he was riding toward the Red Willow to strike a double trail, and his companions were John Nelson and his brother trappers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HERMIT TRAPPER.

At a point on the Republican river, not very far from where the Frenchman's Fork empties into it, is a bold cliff, the summit overgrown with timber, and the approach to it so wild and rugged that not even a red-skin would seek to investigate its recesses.

Landward the cliff breaks off abruptly, overhanging a small, deep stream overhung with willows that fringe its banks, and the branches of which come together over the waters giving them the appearance of being as black as ink.

Half-way up the side of the cliff is a shelf upon which have taken root a number of wild plum and box-elder trees, while massive vines of the wild grape cling to the interstices of the rugged face of the palisade.

These bushes completely conceal the entrance to a large cavern in the cliff, naturally roomy and a safe

retreat, and rendered by man comfortable as an abode, and a fortress of strength.

One seated in the cavern could look out upon the river and far across to the prairies beyond, and be concealed from view by the foliage of the trees, and a canvas curtain that was the color of the cliff, and let down over the entrance to the cave.

Within, the cavern had a number of chambers, branching off to the right and left of the main hallway, the latter in the back part descending abruptly into the very base of the cliff and terminating in another cave that opened out upon the waters of the small stream before referred to, and the entrance to which was securely hidden by the overhanging willows.

Returning to the cavern above, upon the right was a large room, containing a fire-place and chimney made of logs and clay, and with a table and several chairs, all evidently of home manufacture.

In one part of the room was a quantity of firearms, and rudely-made boxes that doubtless contained ammunition, while in a crevice, made to serve as a store-room, hung jerked buffalo and deer-meat, dried fish, and other edibles.

Another cavern chamber on the right of the hall was used as a store-room also, for it was full of beautiful skins of the beaver, buffalo, deer, bear and other animals, all thoroughly tanned.

Back of this room was another, quite well lighted from crevices cut through into the side of the cliff, and with a door that shut it off from the rest of the cavern.

At a glance it was evident that this was a stable, for there were several stalls in it, and in a loft above quantities of dried grass.

Upon the left of the main hall were three or four smaller rooms, all dimly lighted from windows cut in the roof, and three of them furnished as sleeping apartments; that is, with rude beds, bear-skins, and wearing apparel.

One of these rooms was larger and pleasanter than the others, and was really comfortable, while it bore indications that its occupant was of the gentler sex.

Having now given the reader an idea of this strange retreat on the Republican, I will describe the only occupant visible.

In the entrance to the cavern, and looking out upon the Republican and the prairies beyond, sat a man of perhaps fifty-five years of age.

His hair and beard were long, iron-gray and matted, and his eyes bright and glittering.

His form was tall, muscular, and not at all impaired in strength by his age, it seemed, as his movements were quick, and his step firm, as he arose and took down a telescope from a shelf near him.

"There is some one coming; but who?" he muttered, as he turned the glass upon the prairie across the river.

But he evidently could not discover what he wished with the glass, as he laid it aside with a hasty ejaculation.

"The boy has seen whoever it is coming, and is returning with the horses," he muttered, as his eyes fell upon half a dozen ponies, one with a rider, galloping over a roll in the prairie and coming toward the river.

Arriving at the bank, the horseman dashed right into the stream, followed by the other horses, and all were soon swimming for the other shore, and heading toward the cliff.

After a hard swim they came under the cliff and disappeared in the shadow of the willows that overhung the mouth of the small stream.

But the rider guided his own animal into the cavern entrance, and, the others following, they all landed upon a kind of shelf, and ascending the steep path that led to the cavern above, disappeared in the apartment before described as a stable.

Closing the door behind him, the rider the next instant appeared before the old man. He was an

Indian lad of perhaps fifteen, straight as an arrow, with an intelligent, fearless face, and long black hair that hung down to his waist.

He was of the Pawnee nation, and his name in his own tongue was *Likoot pahut*, which, being interpreted, means Red Bird.

"Well, Red Bird, what saw you on the prairie?" asked the old Hermit, as the youth squatted down near him, wholly unmindful of his wet leggings.

"The Red Bird saw Injun on prairie," answered the lad in good English.

"Ah! say you so? How many?"

"One, two, three," said the Indian, counting upon his fingers.

"That looks bad, for the child should certainly return to-day, and— Ha! hand me my glass!" cried the old man suddenly, and the boy placed it in his hand.

"By Heaven! there comes my child, with three Indians in pursuit— Ha! she turns and fires, and down goes the foremost. Nobly done, my brave girl!"

"Me see 'em now, good!" cried the boy, and throwing aside the glass, the Hermit said quickly:

"My rifle, Red Bird!"

In an instant it was placed in his hands by the Indian—a long-range Winchester repeating rifle.

Then he turned his gaze upon the prairie once more, and now plainly visible was a young girl, well mounted and flying at the top-speed of her pony from two Indian warriors that came on in pursuit, while a third lay dead on the prairie, slain by her unerring aim.

At a glance it was evident that the young girl was the Red Plume. She was heading directly toward the river with full speed, and at the point where Red Bird and the horses entered the stream.

"Me go shoot Sioux brave!" cried the Indian boy, suddenly.

"I will attend to that part of it, Bird; but you can go and scalp them; and mind you throw the bodies in the river, and strip their ponies of their trappings and turn them loose."

"Red Bird hear white chief's words," and the boy dashed back into the cavern.

Five minutes after he passed under the cliff, mounted upon a spotted mustang, and holding above his head, as the horse swam to the opposite shore, a rifle and lariat.

In the mean time, the Red Plume had reached the river-bank, and there wheeled and fired rapidly at her pursuers from her repeating rifle; but whether unnerved by her hard ride, she only brought down the mustang ridden by one of them, and as the one still mounted now returned her fire, she pushed her pony boldly into the stream.

"Now is my time!" said the old man, as the two Indians—the one mounted, and the other on foot—came to the bank and were preparing to fire upon the maiden.

Raising his rifle to his shoulder quickly, he fired at the Indian on foot.

But, with the crack of his rifle mingled another report, and down went both red-skins as though they had been pierced by one bullet.

"Well done Red Bird! That was as good a shot as mine," cried the old Hermit as he saw from whence had come the second shot, and the next instant the Indian boy and the maiden passed each other in mid stream.

"Good, Dew Eyes! Bring home three scalps for Likoot pahut," said the boy.

"And good Red Bird to come to my aid," and the two passed away from each other, the lad continuing on to the other shore, and the maiden heading for the cliff.

Following the same course before pursued by the boy, she soon found herself in the cavern, and the next instant was warmly greeted by the Hermit.

"Maud, my dear child, I had begun to fear for you, as you were gone so long."

"I was detained, father; but I hope you will forgive me for riding directly here when those Sioux chased me; but Whalebone was fagged out, and their horses were fresh, and I feared to trust to his speed, and felt that either you or Bird were on the watch, and could surprise my pursuers."

"It is well as it is, Maud; but, tell me the result," and the old man spoke earnestly.

"The general agreed to my terms."

"Thank Heaven! he is alive, then?" said the Hermit, joyously.

"Yes, father, his life was spared; but he was banished from the border posts and forts."

"He has been a very bad man, I fear, Maud, and may continue his evil life; but it was right that I should save him if in my power. God bless you, child, for all you have done for me and the boy; but you led a relief to the lieutenant and his men?"

"Yes, sir."

"And their lives were saved? I am glad of that; you are a noble girl, Maud."

"I deserve no praise, father, for doing my duty," modestly replied the maiden.

"You have done more than your duty, child; but did the soldiers not attempt to follow you?"

"I gave them no opportunity, sir; they were anxious, yet not unpleasantly so, to find out where I lived and something about me; but I eluded all their questions as best I could."

"I'll trust you for that, child; and you are now back in safety and I am happy once more."

"Yet I met with an adventure that nearly terminated seriously."

"Indeed! Tell me of it, Maud."

"My pony fell with me, and before I could mount a horseman came over a roll in the prairie—"

"Red or white?"

"A white man, sir," and the girl dropped her eyes and her face flushed, as though she did not intend to tell all she knew.

"He offered you no insult, I hope, child?"

"Yes, he would have harmed me, for Whalebone ran away from me and I was dismounted; but another person arrived unexpectedly upon the scene, and, oh, father, he was such a splendid-looking man! Well, he just made that other man leave that place quickly, and then wanted to come with me to my home, for he thought I was lost; but of course I would not allow him to do so, though I wanted to, and thanking him for his kindness I left him, and rode on to the Frenchman's Fork where I camped last night."

"Strange that there should be a white man so vile as to attack you, Maud! Do you remember to have seen either of these men on the prairie before?"

"I know the one who came to my aid," evasively replied Maud, and she added, "that is, I heard him tell the other who he was, and I have often heard you speak of him as the bravest scout on the whole border."

"Indeed! what name gave he?"

"Fancy Frank, of Colorado."

"Ha! the man whom the Indians call the Evil Spirit?"

"Yes, sir, and he is very handsome, and just as kind as he could be."

"You are still in your wet clothes, child. Go and change them. Here comes Red Bird, and we will have some supper, for you look both hungry and tired."

Maud retired to the larger and more comfortable sleeping-room, and Red Bird, having stabled his spotted pony, came into the front of the cavern with two fresh scalps hanging to his belt, and an expression of triumph upon his face.

A few moments after Maud came from her chamber, and advancing to the cavern entrance, looked out over the river.

Her father and Red Bird were elsewhere in the cave, and as she stood looking out toward the other shore, a sudden cry sprung to her lips, for upon the other bank, standing just where she had ridden into

the stream, was a horseman, whom, in spite of the distance that separated them, she recognized as Dick Sanford!

She had concealed his treachery to her from her father; should she now call to him and tell him all?

In a quandary she stood, not knowing what to do.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Queen Woodbridge realized the awful situation in which she was placed, she almost lost consciousness, and only by the greatest effort of her will did she prevent herself falling in a swoon across the form of Fancy Frank.

But one thought inspired her to make an attempt to rise above her womanly weakness, and that was that the Scout might not be dead.

"He has fainted from loss of blood; it cannot be that he is dead, for he seemed so strong only a few moments ago," she murmured, and she at once determined to make an examination of his wounds, casting aside all foolish modesty.

But, suddenly, a shadow fell upon her, and with a beating heart she sprang to her feet expecting to behold the hideous face of some painted warrior looking down upon her.

But instead a slender form glided to her side, and a beautiful, yet sunburnt face looked into her own.

"This is a strange place to find a lady—so near the Sioux village. Have you been a captive?" said the new-comer, in a soft, sympathetic voice.

"Yes, and I am so glad to see you. I was captured by Prairie Snake and this gentleman rescued me from the village of the Indians," said Queen earnestly.

"Is he dead?" and the stranger gazed down upon the Scout, for before her eyes had not left the face of Queen.

"I sincerely hope not, for it would grieve me to the heart, as he was wounded in saving me. Do see if he is fatally injured."

The stranger, in whom the kind reader has doubtless ere this recognized Maud of the Red Plume, knelt by the side of the Scout, and an exclamation broke from her lips.

"Oh! do not say that he is dead!" cried Queen.

"No, it is not that! I owe this man my life as well as you," she said, shortly, and tearing aside the Scout's hunting-shirt she examined the wound in his side with the air of one who understood what she was about.

"The ball has glanced on a rib; this is not fatal; and this wound in the leg is serious, yet not dangerous; these cuts and the bullet-wounds have caused him to faint from loss of blood. He must have had a desperate fight, and love you very dearly to risk so much for you."

Queen Woodbridge was a good reader of human nature and she saw at a glance that the girl was jealous of her and she said, quickly:

"No, no, he did not love me, for I never saw him before to-day. He did what any brave man would have done for a woman in distress and danger; but you seem to understand about wounds, and will you dress them?—here are bandages," and Queen tore from her dress the necessary bands, while Maud, no longer jealous, hastily dressed the wounds with a most skillful hand, and then, taking from her pocket a flask she poured a few swallows down his throat.

"My father always makes me carry this, in case I may get hurt or wounded," she said, alluding to the flask, and then she added, thoughtfully:

"Do you know I would rather that man would die than not love me?"

Struck by the frank honesty of the girl Queen quickly said:

"He doubtless will, for you have saved his life. Had you not come he would have died, for I was utterly helpless and could give him no aid."

"You look worn and pale. See, he is coming to

himself again, and I will take you both with me, but upon one condition."

"Certainly, upon any conditions that you name," answered Queen.

"Well, it is that you never reveal what you see there, or tell any one where you were hidden when you return to the fort, for I suppose you live there?"

"Yes, at Fort McPherson—my father is the Post Trader there. No, I will not tell any one that which you wish kept secret."

"Then I will trust you."

At this moment Fancy Frank opened his eyes, and with an effort sat up.

"Ah! Miss Woodbridge, I remember now falling from my horse; and here is the little beauty I met on the prairie, the other day."

"And to her you owe your life, sir, for she has dressed your wounds," said Queen, frankly.

"Then the service I rendered her is more than paid; but I feel as weak as a child."

"No wonder, for you have lost much blood. I will aid you to mount your horse and we will go to my home; but you must promise me, sir, as this lady has done, never to reveal the locality of our retreat, or anything regarding my father or myself."

"I gladly promise. Here, Red Angel, come to me, as I am not able to walk to you."

The obedient horse trotted up, and with some difficulty, and the aid of his two beautiful companions, the Scout got into his saddle, and then Maud gave a low whistle and the spotted pony, which Red Bird swam across the river to get his scalps, came from some box-elder bushes near by, and the two maidens were soon on his back.

Leading the way, after a ride of two or three miles, Maud approached a small stream at a point where numerous tracks showed was a crossing.

But, after riding into the water, instead of crossing to the other side, she turned her pony's head down-stream, and was soon under the shadows of the overhanging willows.

A ride of half a mile, and the stream deepened and the horses began to swim, but were soon safe on *terra firma* in the water-entrance to the Hermit's cavern.

Here Maud and Queen dismounted, but at the request of the former Fancy Frank remained mounted, and his noble steed clambered safely up the steep path, and all were safely in the cavern, where they were met by the surprised Hermit.

"Father this gentleman is the Scout. Fancy Frank, and he has just rescued this lady from the Indian village, and is badly wounded. I found them and brought them here," said Maud, in explanation.

"You did right, Maud; my friends, you are welcome to my home, such as it is," and he approached to aid the Scout in dismounting.

"Where is Bird, father?"

"Across on the prairie where the ponies are feeding."

"Then I will prepare a place for the Scout," and in a few moments Fancy Frank was lying upon a comfortable bed of robes; but his exertions had caused his wounds to reopen, and he was in considerable danger of bleeding to death.

The Hermit Trapper was a skillful surgeon, and while Maud set about making Queen comfortable, he extracted the ball from the side of Fancy Frank, and redressed his wounds, while Red Bird, returning with the horses, built a fire and set about cooking a rude, but substantial meal, while he eyed the lovely face of Queen every time he passed near her.

But as night came on Fancy Frank grew worse; fever set in, and he soon became delirious, and Queen, as had been her intention, determined not to leave him as long as his life was in danger, and Maud, who was to have accompanied her to where the Scout had told them the soldiers were encamped, promised to carry a note to the officer in command.

In a short while Queen wrote the note, for the

Trapper's cavern was well supplied with pen, ink and paper, and robing herself in white, and mounting a snow-white pony, the fearless girl set out just at dark for the troopers' camp, which she approached like a specter and in perfect silence, as she had muffled her horse's hoofs with pads she always carried with her to hide her trail.

How well she accomplished her errand the reader has already seen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RENEGADE.

THE man whom Maud had observed upon the other shore of the river, was indeed none other than Dick Sanford, as she distinctly saw upon turning the glass upon him.

He had made a circuit on the prairie, after having been ordered to depart by Fancy Frank, and then, after some hours, returned to the spot, where the trails plainly showed him that the maiden had continued on alone, for her pony's tracks led south toward the Republican, while those of the large bay ridden by the Scout went in the direction of Fort McPherson.

"I'll solve this mystery, and track that girl to her den, wherever it may be," he muttered, and striking her trail he set off upon it.

Night overtook him, and in spite of his rapid riding he had not come in sight of the object of his pursuit, and he was compelled to camp, as he could not follow the trail in the darkness.

At early morning he was again pushing ahead though, and soon came upon the spot where Maud had passed the night.

"Oh! that I had come upon her here! I would have had it all my own way," he muttered, and he urged his horse forward at a more rapid pace.

But Maud had started an hour earlier than had Dick Sanford, and he failed to come in sight of her; but pressing on, he came to where another trail joined hers.

"Unshod ponies! Indians are on her trail as well as I. I may arrive in time to serve her, and thus gain a point in my favor," and he urged his horse into a swift gallop.

Suddenly he drew rein, for before him lay the dead body of an Indian pony, a bullet-wound in his head.

"This has not been done two hours; she is a crack shot, and I must be cautious not to have her turn her rifle upon me. Ha! this looks as though a man had tumbled from his horse, and here is where they drove her into the river! Great Heaven! can they have driven her to her death? There are tracks here of many horses, but this is where the wild ponies come to drink, doubtless. Where can she be, and where are those three red-skins, I wonder?"

"The river is too broad here to think of crossing; and besides, there is no landing on the other bank; so what is to be done?"

For some moments he stood in deep thought, little knowing that the object of his search was then looking upon him.

At length he turned down the stream, muttering almost savagely:

"I'll do it! I can go down to where Carr's trail crosses, and there go over to the other side and camp for the night, and to-morrow I will go to the village."

With a sudden impulse he drove his spurs into the flanks of the splendid animal he rode, and continued on down the road until he came to the trail where General Carr had crossed with an expedition some time before.

Having gained the other bank, as darkness was coming on, he camped for the night; but, bright and early he was on the move again, and after a few hours' ride his quick eye detected a distant horseman.

With his hands held above his head in token of peace he approached the red-skin, who stood on his

guard, and speaking the Sioux tongue, he greeted the Indian with the one word—

"Washta!"

The Sioux repeated the word, and Dick Sanford told him he had come to see the chief.

Instantly the Indian gave a shrill call, and a few moments after several mounted warriors dashed up, one of whom the white man recognized as having seen at Fort McPherson several times, and to whom he had shown some kindnesses.

The Sioux greeted him kindly, and learning his intention they rode back to the Indian village of Old Whistler, distant several miles.

Upon his arrival, that chief received him coldly, until Dick Sanford said, in his deep, earnest tones:

"Chief, I was sentenced to die by my comrades, and I escaped from the fort and have come to you.

"Here let me make my home among your people—and to prove that my tongue is straight, I will lead a band of your warriors against a wagon-train which I know is coming up the Republican from Kansas. Does the chief hear?"

Then Old Whistler's heart warmed toward the renegade, and he answered quietly:

"The ears of the chief are open; his pale-face brother is welcome to the lodges of my people. Let him lead my warriors upon the trail of his white brothers, and he shall be a chief among the Sioux; if his tongue is crooked he shall die!"

"So be it, chief. To-morrow will be time to start, for they will cross the Republican near the mouth of the Medicine, and not within two suns."

"My pale-face brother speaks well; let him enter the lodge that shall be given him."

The man turned away, his face as white as the dead, his lips compressed and his eyes blazing, as from his lips broke the words, like a wail of the damned:

"Oh, God, have mercy upon me! I am a renegade from my own race; but I cannot go backward now."

Then turning quickly again to Old Whistler, he said recklessly:

"Ho, chief! I want only warriors who are not afraid to kill to go with me; if there is a squaw-brave in the number, I will kill him with my own hand!"

"My white brother speaks straight; my braves that go with him love the war-path, and it makes their hearts glad to see the scalps of the pale-faces at their belts."

"Then they shall have them. Now, both my horse and myself need rest," and entering the tepee assigned to him, he threw himself down upon a pile of robes, while an Indian led his horse away at a command from the chief.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ATTACK.

Two days after the arrival of Dick Sanford in the Indian village of Old Whistler, and toward evening, a wagon-train was slowly crawling over the rolling prairie, and heading for the Republican river, a mile away.

There were a score of these "prairie schooners," both army and emigrant wagons, while a detachment of cavalry rode in the rear, and several scouts were in advance.

At the head of the troopers, a dozen in number, was a young officer of striking appearance, and who sat his black steed with the ease of a perfect horseman.

He was dressed in cavalry boots, blue pants, a jacket, bearing a captain's straps on the shoulder, and a broad sombrero, with one side pinned up by a pair of gold sabers.

There were a pair of revolvers in his saddle-holsters, another in his belt, and also a knife, while upon his side hung a saber, and at his back was slung a repeating rifle.

With an exceedingly handsome and resolute face, his hair worn long, and a splendid form, Captain

Arthur Gray was a young man to attract the admiration of men as well as women.

"Capt'in, yonder is whar we will camp fer ther night," said a weather-beaten old guide in buckskin, turning toward the young officer, and pointing to a distant clump of cottonwoods.

"All right, Lasso Dan; we will ride on and have all ready for the wagons by the time they arrive," and the officer and his men dashed on and were soon dismounted in the timber, on the river-bank.

"Capt'in, I don't like ther looks o' things hereabout."

"What is it, Dan?" asked Captain Gray, as the old scout and guide approached.

"I smell Injuns."

"You smell Indians, Dan?" asked Captain Gray, with a laugh.

"I does, by jingo; thar has been Injuns heur within ther hour, an' they isn't far away, now; but thet hain't ther worst o' it."

"Go on, Dan."

"They is in large force."

"Ah! then we will have to be on our guard."

"You bet, capt'in, an' we'll hev to fortify this night o' our Lord, by jingo!"

"You think they mean to attack us, then?"

"Thet's it; you knows we has heerd ther Sioux an' Cheyennes was on the war-path, an' I guesses as how they thinks they'll jist take us in out o' ther wet."

"We have forty-one men, all told, Dan, and can give them a good fight before they get our scalps," said Arthur Gray, firmly.

"An' they has about two hundred, capt'in."

"Ha! as many as that?"

"You bet! I has been watchin' ther trail; they comed here ter this timber, an' seein' us comin', they went back up ther river, an' they's about two hundred hoof o' them."

"Then I will at once arrange to give them a lively fight. By Jupiter, there they are, now! Mount, men! mount, for your lives, and follow me!"

The voice of the young officer rung out loud and clear, as he sprung to throw his saddle upon his steed, while the soldiers and scouts followed his example, at the same time gazing upon a large band of mounted warriors that suddenly charged from a canyon, nearly a mile away, directly upon the wagon-train.

"By Heaven, that is too bad, too bad!" cried the young captain, as he saw the teamsters and men of the train, instead of fighting the red-skins, spring upon their horses and mules and dash away, leaving the wagons to the mercy of the yelling savages.

"Come, men! Ride for your lives!" cried Arthur Gray, and he started for the wagons, from several of which came a rifle-shot, where some emigrant had remained firm to defend his all.

"Capt'in, hold on! You hes yer hands full, I'm thinkin'."

It was Lasso Dan who spoke, as he dashed alongside of the officer and pointed across the plain to the right, where, over a hill, came a hundred warriors in all the glory of war-paint and feathers.

"Back to the timber, men, and form to resist attack!" cried the captain, in a cheery voice, and in two minutes the troopers and scouts with him were formed in a semicircle of battle, the ends resting on the river-bank, and their horses in a ravine.

In the mean time the first band of Indians had reached the train, when a few shots, and then a silence told that all was over there, and half a hundred warriors scattered in pursuit of the flying men.

With bitter chagrin Captain Gray saw that the train was lost, and then turned to look after the safety of himself and men, for he knew their situation was most precarious.

Nearer and nearer came the yelling savages, until within a hundred yards of the timber, and then came the order, given in the cool, calm tones of the captain, who with his repeating-rifle in hand stood like a lion at bay:

"Men, throw no shots away; take sure aim—fire!"

Almost like one shot the carbines and rifles flashed, and down went a dozen ponies and Indians, which checked their charge, and a hasty dropping fire caused them to quickly withdraw out of range.

"Them other devils is comin' to ther ball," announced Lasso Dan, pointing to the Indians who had captured the train, and who were now riding toward their comrades.

"And, by the Lord Harry, a white man is at their head!" cried Captain Gray in surprise.

"If it hain't so, I are a liar! Ther dog-goned sneakin' renegade! Ef he comes near, I'll jist make him food fer coyotes, ef they'll eat a man so mean," gritted Lasso Dan.

"He is going to give you an opportunity to try your aim, for see! he has urged the Indians to charge once more."

"True fer yer, capt'in; but arter he gits 'em started he'll drop to the rear."

But old Dan was wrong in this surmise, for having formed the warriors for a second charge, he rode to the front and led them on.

Like a human avalanche they came toward the timber, their yells enough to make the stoutest heart quake.

Then from the timber burst a sheet of flame, and down went the advance line of warriors, yet the white chief was unharmed, and calling to those behind to follow he pressed on.

"Drat his pictur'! I'll kill him, by jingo!" and Lasso Dan blazed away with his old muzzle-loading rifle.

But, still on came the renegade chief, apparently unharmed.

"By jingo! he are not mortal, for I put one o' them liver pills I had in my pocket inter ther old gun instead o' a bullet. Rattle at him, capt'in, with yer pepper-box rifle," cried old Dan, and quickly sped the bullets from the captain's Winchester; still the chief came on, though warriors fell thick around him. Unable to stand the galling fire the Sioux turned and retreated out of range, their white leader slowly following them when he saw that he was left alone.

"Waal, thet white devil are a brave one, by jingo! an' as cool as ice o' a May mornin'. But, capt'in, yonder comes most all o' ther reds as went arter them cowardly teamsters. Some o' 'em has scalps, an' some hasn't, fer them men was skeert clean through, an' run all-fired fast. Now, what is yer gwine ter do, may I ax?"

"Certainly, Dan. As the train is in the hands of the Indians, and they are ten to one against us, I will retreat as soon as it gets dark, and make for Fort McPherson."

"Good sense, by jingo! Ther Ingins will creep up on us in ther night, an' then we'd not stand the chance we does now, so it's good sense to levant, an' we kin jist go down to ther river an' find a place we can ford acrost. I guesses as how the wounded boys will hev ter stan' it, an' ther dead fellers won't car' how much they's jolted; but you've made a good fight o' it, capt'in, an' ef we'd all been at the wagins, we'd all been in heavin or some other huntin'-groun' now, by jingo!"

It was then decided to retreat as soon as it was dark. The horses were led from the ravine to the river, the three soldiers who had been killed in the fight were strapped upon the backs of their own steeds, and the half-dozen wounded men stood ready to mount.

As the shadows crept over the prairie, the advance, of the dead and wounded, with one of the scouts, moved into the river, while, to hide their intention Captain Gray, with Lasso Dan and two troopers, hurried from point to point in the timber, and sent shots out across the prairie.

Then they kindled several small fires, and hastened to mount their horses and swim across the stream.

Arriving on the other bank, they set off on a north

course toward Fort McPherson, and had ridden but a mile, when far behind them were heard the yells of the Indians charging the timber where they believed their foes yet lay concealed.

"Push, pards, push! Don't mind bein' shook up, you as has been hurted, 'kase it s more healthy than hair-raisin' be; an' don't mind jostlin' ther dead, fer they don't keer," cried Lasso Dan, and the whole party pressed forward at a more rapid pace.

"Capt'in, you hears thet yell?" suddenly asked Lasso Dan.

"Yes."

"Waal, thet tarnal white critter hes urged them red niggers ter foller an' cotch us on ther open parrer, I hears 'em plugin' tha'r horses inter ther river now."

"You are right, Dan, but a stern chase is a long one, and if they do overtake us, why we must fight them to the bitter end."

"Sense, capt'in—prime good sense; but let's push ahead, 'kase my bald head don't feel uncommon comfortable," and the remark of the old guide caused the troopers to press on still faster, for all now knew that their savage foes were hard on their trail.

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

WHEN the youth known as Roy Reese left the fort in company with John Nelson and the other trappers, whose services he had engaged as guides and scouts, they struck right for the Red Willow, and, following the directions given by General Emory, found the identical spot where Red Plume's horse had fallen with her, and she had been rescued from Dick Sanford by Fancy Frank.

The trails of the three were old, but the craft of Nelson solved the riddle, as follows:

"Thet is ther track o' ther gal's pony, an' heur are hern. This one are the soger's horse; yer see it are iron-shod an' an American horse; an' heur is ther trail o' ther scout, fer it are ther same hoof mark as was shown us near ther fort by ther sentinel."

"And the girl—where did she go?" eagerly asked the youth.

"Thet's to be diskivered, boss. She struck off thet away, toward ther Red Willow stream yonder; yer see its course by ther willows an' cottonwoods growin' on its banks."

"And the trail of Sanford—which way does it lead?"

"It leads to ther east'ard; now which shell we foller fu'st, boss?"

"The girl's," vehemently said Reese.

"Right thar, pard! I loves ther gals best myself. Come, fellers, let's trail ther leetle gal to her den," and the party set off, the trappers following at a trot a trace that was not visible to the eye of the youth.

Crossing the Red Willow they suddenly came to a halt.

"What is it, guide?" asked Roy Reese, anxiously.

"Guesses as how we've treed two 'possums up ther same tree."

"How mean you?"

"Here are ther track o' ther soger's horse fol lowin' on ther trail o' ther gal!"

"Ha! Then push on, for I am most anxious to meet that man," and the lips of Roy Reese were compressed, and his eyes flashed.

Again the trailers went to work, and until nightfall they followed the tracks and then to the great chagrin of Roy Reese, went into camp.

"It's as plain as Bible readin' by daylight, boss; but we hain't cat eyes to see how ter prow! at night," said Andy Barrett, seeing the youth's impatience.

"I know, my friends, that you cannot do more; what you have already done seems to partake of the instinct almost of a wild beast; but you have no idea how I long to see Richard Sanford, face to face," said Roy Reese, as if in apology for his impatience.

"It are none o' my quarrel, boss; but I will say, ef it's ter mean fight with thet same Dick Sanford when you coteh him, you has ter be an early bird with yer shootin-irons, fer he's lightnin on ther draw an' sudden death on ther shoot. We'll not see yer hurt ef we kin chip in; but I jist flings in a word o' warnin'."

"And I thank you. Do you see that spot on the tree, near the fire?" and Roy Reese pointed to a spot, the size of a silver dollar, plainly visible by the light of the fire, upon a cottonwood, some fifteen paces distant.

"I sees it, boss."

Without a word Roy Reese drew his revolver like a flash of lightning, and fired three times in rapid succession; then, changing the weapon to his left hand, he emptied it, and the trappers beheld the six bullets imbedded in the mark, not an inch apart.

Then, drawing his knife, he hurled it at the tree, and it stuck in the midst of the bullets, burying the blade two inches deep.

"You is lightnin' on ther shoot, and with a knife, too, boss! Guesses as how you kin take keer o' yer-self; but I hopes that shootin' won't bring down any Injuns upon us, fer red-skins hain't healthy diet at this time o' year," said Nelson.

"It was imprudent of me to fire; but when I have been under your tuition a while longer, I hope to be a good prairie man."

"We can't l'arn yer no shootin' an' knife bizziness, boss; but we'll l'arn yer how ter trail, an' ther pararer signs, an' many a man has saved his topknot by knowing 'em, you bet; but, while the boys is cookin' grub, I'll jist skoot around an' see ef ther's any Injuns about," and John Nelson left the camp on foot. In half an hour he returned, reporting all quiet, and, after a substantial meal, all retired to their blankets to sleep, excepting Hank Clifford, who was to stand guard.

With the morning they were again upon the trail, which led them to the Republican river, where they lost it.

But they searched diligently to solve the riddle of the other trails, and Jack Nelson at last gave his "opinion."

"Thar was Injuns come upon ther gal heur, an' it's my opinion they was wiped out by ther sojer, Dick Sanford, 'ka'se the'r trails ends here; an' so does ther gal's; but then, her pony mou't hev died in ther water, an' she comed out an' mounted behind the soldier, an' went down ther river with him."

"You are certain that only *one* person went down the river, and that man Dick Sanford?" eagerly asked Roy Reese.

"No, pard; I don't say that; but I are sart'in thet but one hoss went down ther river bank, an' thet hoss war ther sojer's; who war on his back, I can't tell, yet it 'pears to me it war Dick Sanford, an' ther gal mou't be ridin' behind him."

"But the Indian horses? You say there were three of them; and there lies the carcass of but one."

"Yes, boss, an' ther other two tuk to ther river, thet's plain; but we'll foller the trail o' ther American hoss, an' then we'll soon find out who's a-ridin' of him."

"How?"

"Waal, when he camps we'll see his tracks; Injuns don't wear boots."

"You are indeed a wonderful reader of prairie signs, Nelson, and I trust most thoroughly in you," said Roy Reese; and again mounting, they followed the trail down the river until night overtook them, when they went into camp in a motte of box-elders.

Crossing the Republican the following morning, and discovering in which direction the trail led, Jack Nelson came to a halt.

"Pards, I don't half-like ther way he are a-headin' now; it are straight for ther villages o' them durned red-skins."

"But would *he* dare go there?" asked Roy Reese.

"A man who hain't 'lowed ter live anywhar else on ther border—an' I heern thet sich was the gen'ral's orders—can't be over pertickler 'bout whar he is ter lay out, an' he goes among Injuns fer comp'ny."

"Would he become a renegade to his race?" asked Reese, in a nervous manner.

"Ef his race hev cut his acquaintanee, it 'pears ter me as tho' he must look up 'sociates elsewhar."

"Then, what is to be done?"

"I don't give it as Gospil, pard, that he hes gone with ther Injins, only it looks thet way. Now we is ter go an' find out."

Again moving forward, the party pressed on until they came to a spot in a clump of timber where the trappers began to search the ground most diligently.

"Well?" asked Roy Reese, who had watched their movements with the deepest interest.

"Waal, pard, things is workin' queer in these parts. We is as near them beast Injuns as I cares to be, an' ther trail we hes been foll'win' branches off heur ter ther village o' thet imp o' eternity, Old Whistler. Then ag'in, here in these very precincts are other trails as look queer, fer, comin' from ther village o' ther Sioux Medicine Chief White Wolf, are ther tracks o' thet Fancy Scout's horse—"

"Fancy Frank?"

"Ther same; I marked his horse's huf well when he come to ther camp afore settin' out arter ther gal."

"Then he did not succeed in rescuing her? Poor girl!"

"You is ahead o' ther hounds, pard, fer he *did* git her away from ther Injuns, as her tracks is round here same as duck-tracks round a pond."

"Thank God she is saved then?"

"Waal, here is a place whar ther scout tuk a tumble."

"A what?"

"A tumble; thet is, he fell off his horse, an' ther marks goes ter show he was wounded, fer he bleed-ed a heap."

"Poor man! Was he killed do you think?"

"Now, yer is axin' connundrums, pard. He war wounded, an' he went away from heur on his horse, and when he come ther' was one gal with him, an' when he left ther' war *two*."

"Come, Mr. Nelson, do tell me how you know all this?" said Roy Reese doubtingly.

"Waal, ther' comes the Scout's trail yonder; ther' goes ther trail o' Dick Sanford yonder to Old Whistler's camp; here is whar ther Scout tumbled from his horse, and here is whar he laid an' bled some, an' around heur is ther small heel shoe-track of Miss Queen's leetle foot, an' comin' yonder are a pony-track thet stops in ther bushes over thar, while ther rider's leetle foot made a trail right heur as plain as day, an' from ther 'pearances o' things, I'm sart'in she helped ther Scout an' gal; but whether ther Scout is dead, or whar they all be, is fer us yit ter find out."

"And the girl, who is she?"

"Ther same as we traileed to ther banks o' ther Republican."

"Ha! she was then on *his* trail!"

"You mean on Dick Sanford's?"

"Yes."

"Can't say that; her trail don't come followin' on his'n, but she mou't hev knowed whar he'd gone, an' been goin' arter him when she comed upon the Scout and Miss Queen."

"What you describe I am wholly unable to see; the traces of blood and the hoof-tracks are visible, yes, but I cannot understand how it is you can read in them all that you do."

"We puts this an' thet together, pard; now this heur country hain't as healthy as it might be, owin' ter red-skins, an' I move an' second ther motion thet we foller ther trails thet leave these diggin's."

"You know best, Nelson," said Roy Reese, dejectedly.

"Then we follers in ther footsteps o' ther Scout's an' ther gals' horses," and taking the trail, the party turned back in almost a parallel direction to that which they had come.

After awhile they came to the little stream into which the Red Plume had turned, and here all trace was lost.

Up and down the stream the trappers went, and then across, but nowhere was the trail visible.

"Perhaps they turned up or down the stream to throw any one off their trail," suggested Roy Reese.

"Pard, yer is gittin' eddicated fast; thet's what they hes done, an' we was blind as owls in daylight not ter hev see'd it afore," and Nelson went down while Ruff went up the stream, the others awaiting them at the crossing.

In fifteen minutes Jack Nelson returned.

"Waal, they didn't go thet way, fer it leads to ther shades o' darkness in ther waters, an' I kept on until my pony was swimmin', an' then turned back, fer ther stream runs right inter ther Republican, an' no landin' anywhar."

Just then Ruff returned, and all saw that he had something to communicate.

"Boys, I didn't find ther trail I was looking for, but I run across one as is quite interesting."

"We is all 'tentive, pard; proceed with yer discourse," said Nelson.

"'Bout a mile above heur thar is a crossing, an' it hasn't been long since a million Injuns has crossed it."

"Hold on, pard! Guesses they wasn't a million," said Monte Clifford.

"Well, ther' might hev been a few less; but there were at least two hundred of 'em, as I judged."

"Thet mou't be; which way war they goin'?" asked Jack Nelson.

"Down ther Republican."

"Then we will strike tha'r trail, 'kase I guesses our blind eyes kin foller it an' we'll see what devilment them red devils is up ter. Ef it's ther settle-mints or ther forts they is aimin' arter, our work is laid out fer us. Come, pards, an' we'll take ther stream up from heur."

Riding into the water they turned against the current, and soon came to where the trail crossed.

"Jewillikins! thar was a power of 'em, sart'in; but it's time ter look fer a camp, pards, an' ter-morrer we'll strike tha'r trail an' foller it fer all it's worth," announced John Nelson.

Finding a suitable camping-place, quite a distance up the stream, as it was not yet dark, John Nelson started on foot for a little "look around," as he expressed it.

"Can I accompany you, Nelson?" asked Roy Reese, who seemed impatient when not moving ahead.

"Sart'in! Yer might l'arn somethin'."

The two set forth together and reached the crossing just after sunset.

But ere they could look around the quick eye of the trapper caught sight of moving objects in the distance.

"Come, pard, lay low," and springing into the stream, he was quickly followed by Roy Reese.

"No time ter levant now, pard; we has ter lay low heur; jist make yerself as small as yer kin convenient, an' pull ther willows 'round yer; thet's it."

"What is it you see?" asked Roy Reese, at the same time concealing himself as well as he could.

"Don't see northin'; don't wanter see northin' nuther; but I *did* see Injuns, an' they is 'most heur, so keep yer fly-trap closed."

Roy Reese took the hint, especially as at that moment came the tramp of hoofs, and a moment after two men rode into the stream, and their horses stopped to drink.

One of those horsemen was a white man—the other an Indian.

The Indian was Old Whistler, the Dog Soldier Sioux chief, in all the paraphernalia of savage war costume,

The other was Dick Sanford, the renegade!

Then to the ears of the listeners came the words of Old Whistler, as he addressed his companion:

"My pale-face brother is a great chief; he make my people happy with good things, and my young men proud with scalps. My white brother shall be named *Serare-Root-Kary*."*

"Ha, ha, chief! I will make even you drunk with the white blood I shall shed on this border," came in the deep voice of the renegade.

John Nelson glanced his eyes toward Roy Reese, and saw him drawing his revolver from his belt.

Instantly his iron hand fell on the youth's arm, while he said in a hoarse whisper:

"Are yer mad? Thar is a army o' reds followin' 'em."

"It is he! It is Richard Sanford! Let my hand go, for he is in my power at last—at last!" gritted Reese.

"Pard, ef yer move a inch, ef yer speak ag'in, I'll drive my knife to yer heart, so help me God!"

The stern whisper, the glaring eyes, and fierce clutch of the giant brought Roy Reese to his senses, and he bowed his head and remained silent and still, while the white and red chief rode on, and behind them came scores of red-skins.

Then followed the captured mules and oxen of the wagon-train, a few cows and sheep that had belonged to the settlers, a small drove of horses, and the rear was brought up by over a hundred wild savages.

It was dark now, and, with more confidence in their retreat, the two men crouched down until the last red-skin had crossed the stream; then, springing from their place of concealment, they hastened with all speed back to their camp.

"It was Richard Sanford, and now he is forever lost to me!" said Roy Reese, in trembling tones.

"No, pard: yer heerd his threat, so my advice is, go back to the fort, fer the sojers will yet catch him."

"I believe you are right; let us return to Fort McPherson," said the youth, in a low, sad tone.

And thus it was decided, and the party started back that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

THOUGH Fancy Frank had fought two good fights, after receiving his first wound, and one after the pistol shot in his side, and had been gashed up in his knife combat with Prairie Snake his remarkable strength and tenacity of purpose had held him up for a long time after, and only when he had bled most freely did weakness overcome him.

But this great loss of blood caused him to have to fight off death with iron will, as he lay in the cavern of the Hermit Trapper, suffering intensely from his wounds, and cared for day and night by the Hermit and his two fair and faithful nurses.

If Queen Woodbridge felt any love growing in her heart for the splendid man whom she nursed so tenderly, she kept it well concealed, for she saw that the whole being of Maud was wrapped up in him.

Nor was the old Hermit blind to the idolatrous worship of his child for the handsome stranger, yet he said nothing.

After a few days of illness, in which Fancy Frank's life hung on a thread, his strong constitution rallied above aches and wounds, and the Trapper pronounced him out of danger.

"Now I will return to the fort, for I feel that my conscience will not trouble me for so doing, as long as the Scout is recovering," said Queen one day to Maud.

"I will be so glad to have you remain, for you have been so sweet and kind to me, and to us all; but if you wish it I will go with you to the fort," replied Maud, whose jealousy of Queen had now en-

* Every man behind him,

tirely departed, and who had learned to love her dearly.

"No, let Red Bird guide me there, for you cannot leave the Scout."

"I can leave him and I will, for my father will take good care of him."

"I will make you a present of my spotted pony, Wild Boy, as I call him, and we will go together."

"But you will not return alone?" said Queen.

"Oh, yes; I was alone when I first saw you, and I go anywhere by myself without fear, for my father has taught me all the craft of an Indian."

"It is strange how you enjoy this life you live, alone in a wilderness."

"No, I have my father and Red Bird; then there are my books to read in bad weather, and my father has taught me a great deal, and whenever he goes to the post after ammunition and stores he always brings me presents of books and other nice things; then I have my horses, and I love hunting and fishing, so you see I am happy."

"But you seem to have no desire to live in the outside world?"

"I read of the world elsewhere, and father says when he dies he wishes me to go to the city to live, and he sells his furs every year and lays up money for me to spend, and I shall have a great deal, for he is a great trapper and then Bird and myself trap also; but I hope he will live a long time to make me happy."

"But you will have some one else to share your love—I mean Fancy Frank."

"Oh, yes, I love him more than all else. Strange, isn't it, when I only met him a short while ago! I hope he will come here to live with us, for then we would all be so happy."

Queen gazed upon the innocent girl, and thought how different she was from the bright butterflies raised in cities.

"How old are you, Maud?" she asked.

"Eighteen."

"And you were born here in this cave?"

"I think not; but I don't know; father does not talk to me of that. He says I was left to him as a trust."

"But he is your own father?"

"I expect so; I don't know as I ever had another; but he is so good to me, and I am happy, while he is often sad, and at night I hear him moaning as though in pain; but he says it is nothing when I go to him—only bad dreams. Now, all my dreams are good, aren't yours?"

Queen answered lightly, and then the two decided to start that night for Fort McPherson.

Bidding the Scout and her new-found friends good-by, while to the surprise of Queen, Maud, after kissing her father, in her innocent affections not only kissed Fancy Frank, whose white face crimsoned, but also Red Bird, the two girls mounted their ponies, and thoroughly armed and equipped, rode down the steep pathway into the waters below.

The two ponies easily swam across the river, and were soon on their way at a brisk trot to Fort McPherson.

With the skill of a thorough plainsman Maud led the way through the darkness, and at daylight they went into camp for rest and food for "girl and beast" on the banks of the Red Willow, not very far from the spot where the Hermit Huntress had met with the adventure with Dick Sanford.

"Should not one of us keep watch?" asked Queen.

"Oh, no; the ponies are trained, and if there is any one near they will waken me," and rolling themselves in their blankets, the two girls were soon fast asleep, unmindful that cruel foes were then creeping upon them from the cover of the willows not far away.

Out of the willows' dense foliage suddenly appeared a painted face, and then the person of a warrior.

A moment more and a second, and a third, then a fourth and a fifth appeared, and a glance at them

from a frontiersman, and he would have pronounced them Cheyennes, the bravest and most cruel Indians of the Plains.

With the stealthy steps of a cat creeping upon a bird, and as deadly, they approached nearer and nearer to the sleeping maidens, while the ponies, having eaten a hearty breakfast, and fatigued by the long, hard ride of the night, stood dozing in the shade, wholly unconscious of danger so near at hand.

Nearer and nearer crept the five savages, until at length, panther-like, they prepared for the fatal spring, and one of them, stepping on a twig that cracked beneath his feet, awoke the drowsy ponies, who gave a snort of fright at the sight before them.

Instantly Red Plume attempted to spring to her feet, but three bronze savages caught her in their powerful arms, while the other two seized hold of poor Queen, who woke up as though from a frightful nightmare.

"They've got us, Queen; but that's all right," said the plucky Maud; but ere she could say more a rough hand was placed rudely over her mouth, and the next instant the two captives were securely bound, hand and foot.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BITERS BITTEN.

WHEN Captain Arthur Gray, his troopers and scouts fled from the Indians, they soon found that, retarded as they were by their dead and wounded, they could not hope to escape from their pursuers.

"Dan, is there any place near here suitable to stand a siege?" asked Captain Gray, as the pursuers drew nearer.

"Yas, capt'in, thar ar' a canyon on the Medicine, not far away, whar we could hold out prime, as long as our ammunition and perwisions holds out."

"Then head for there at once. Now, tell me, who is the best man among your scouts to send to the fort?"

"Long Tom are a good one, capt'in."

"Then, when we reach the canyon, he must keep right on to the fort, and tell General Emory that we are besieged on the Medicine."

"That's prime sense, by jingo! Here's Long Tom, capt'in, an' thar's ther canyon."

The scout, Long Tom, soon received his orders, and sped away like the wind; but hardly had he gone half a mile, when down went his horse in a prairie dog hole, and in a limp heap fell the rider.

Several moments passed, and neither horse nor rider arose; the former lay with a broken shoulder, and the latter was dead, his neck having been broken by the fall.

"But, believing they were flying rapidly on for succor, the troopers sought the canyon, and instantly prepared for action."

With their knives, breastworks were hastily thrown up; their horses were placed in a safe retreat, in a hollow where there were both water and grass; the dead were buried, while all wounded able to aid in defense, took positions with their comrades.

Soon after, the Indians came up, having followed on the troopers' trail, and at once they charged the position, and were driven back with loss, while, protected as they were, the besieged suffered very little.

With the morning light, not a red-skin was visible, but, regardless of the advice of Lasso Dan, a soldier exposed himself, and fell dead, pierced by a dozen bullets.

"Thet are a hint to lie low, pards. Ef thet durned fool hed 'bayed orders, he'd 'a' had more fun yit in life," was Dan's comment.

With almost constant skirmishing, and an occasional charge, two days passed away, and yet no help came from the fort.

The grass in the hollow was eaten up, their own provisions had given out, and their ammunition was

almost exhausted, so that Arthur Gray felt that something must be promptly done.

"Dan, is there any way of getting out of here?"

"It mou't be done; won't say it can be, capt'in," was the cautious reply.

"How?"

"Waal, over ther hills back of us; but we'd hev to be awful car'ful, an' somebody had oughter stay to keep up ther idee we is still in jail."

"I will stay. You go out with the men, Dan," was the prompt reply.

"Capt'in, yer is a man, by jingo! But I'll tell yer what we'll do. I'll go an' see what are ther prospects fer levantin', and then ther other scouts an' trappers kin git, while you an' myself jist raise ther devil with ther savages in ther front an' make 'em think we is gwine ter charge out on 'em."

"A good idea, Dan; but I cannot ask you to remain. I have a repeating rifle, and can, by firing from different points, make them think we are all still here."

"Capt'in, I fears you isn't acquainted with old Lasso Dan, fer when he makes up his mind, ther Rock o' Ages an' old Gibralt'y glued together 'ith sealin' wax, hain't stronger set. I stays with you; ther rest o' ther capoodle kin go to ther fort, but I hain't gwine ter leave a man as has your grit to ther Injuns—no—sir—ee, by jingo!"

Seeing that the old scout's mind was made up, Captain Gray ordered the men to prepare to depart, and Lasso Dan went to see that the way was clear in the rear.

The troopers and all did not wish to leave the gallant officer; but he sternly ordered them to obey, and soon after, under the guidance of a scout by the name of Wooley, they departed from the canyon, while Captain Gray and Lasso Dan remained and kept up a hot fire in the direction from whence came an occasional shot from the Indians.

Wooley, the scout, proved to be a most efficient guide; the party safely passed over the hills, and thus through the Indian lines, who, presuming upon the impossibility of a horse escaping in that way, deemed it unnecessary to have a guard there.

Fortunately, in a valley near the river, the party came upon a number of Indian ponies, and instantly they were all mounted and dashing away.

For some time they had ridden on, when to their ears came the rattle of fire-arms, and they felt that the red-skins were again charging the canyon, and one and all deeply grieved for the two gallant men they had left behind, and who had offered their lives as a sacrifice for their comrades.

Suddenly they came upon a dead horse and rider, and then they knew why succor had not come to them from the fort, for it was the body of Long Tom and his steed.

Pushing rapidly on, the wounded having to grin and bear their suffering, the little party arrived in good time at the fort, where their sad story of the loss of the train, and noble sacrifice of Captain Gray and Lasso Dan was soon told, spreading sorrow and gloom over all, and causing General Emory to start a battalion under Captain Taylor to pursue and punish the Indians if possible.

But the sympathy for the death of Arthur Gray and Lasso Dan was uncalled for, as neither of them had "passed in their checks" as was so certainly believed they had.

Finding, by the silence that followed their departure, that their comrades had escaped, the two noble men set about hatching some plan for their own escape.

"Dan, I'll tell you what we'll do, though it seems cruel."

"I are all ears, capt'in."

"Let us mount dummies on the horses, form them in line, and rush them out upon the Indians, and then, when they all rush to head them off, we will dart away across the prairie."

"Capt'in, yer head has sense in it, by jingo! It are rough on ther animiles; but, then, ther Great

Sperrit made beastes fer ther use o' man. Now let's set ter work, fer them Injuns mou't think they was invited to ther leetle surprise-party, an' come too soon."

In a few moments the horses were all saddled and bridled, and then the animals belonging to Captain Gray and Lasso Dan were separated from the others.

In leaving, the party which had escaped to the fort had left every useless piece of clothing, and with the aid of the saddle-blankets and some buffalo-grass and willow branches these were soon made into dummy men and fastened with lariats securely upon the backs of the poor dumb brutes, who were so patiently waiting to save human lives at the risk of their own.

When all was in readiness they were led to the mouth of the canyon, twenty-five in number, and Lasso Dan stood in the rear, holding his own and the captain's horse.

Then, with yells infernal from the two men, the doomed animals dashed out of the canyon, down the hill.

Their sudden coming showed that the plot had not been consummated any too soon, for numbers of dark forms silently creeping upon the besieged men, sprung to their feet, and instantly a galling fire was poured upon the now maddened and frightened horses that rushed down the hillside like an avalanche.

"Now, Dan, mount and away!" cried Arthur Gray, and dashing out of the canyon they turned short off to the left, and gained the open prairie ere they were discovered and the ruse found out, by Indians rushing up to a fallen horse and rider to secure their bloody trophy—the pale-face scalps.

Instantly, with wild yells, they dashed up the valley for their horses, and to their rage, many a bold warrior found himself without a steed; but others, more fortunate, whose ponies had not been taken, mounted in hot haste, and quickly spread over the prairie in pursuit of the daring men who had so cleverly eluded them.

Then it became a chase for life or death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE-PARTY ALL ROUND.

A MAN lay asleep in a dense undergrowth upon the banks of the Red Willow.

The sun had arisen, yet its rays seemed not to arouse the tired man, and his horse at last began to move about to the end of the lariat, as though uneasy at the long sleep of his master.

Then the man sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Gracious! So late? How tired I was when I camped here last night; but the rest has done me good," and he sprung to his feet—a tall, powerfully made man of fine physique; a heavily-bearded face, his black whiskers and raven hair worn long, leaving only his forehead and eyes exposed; and a handsome face, burnt very brown, and with eyes that were intensely bright.

His horse, too, was a splendid animal, black as night, and well equipped, while the rider was thoroughly armed with a late-pattern repeating-rifle, gold-mounted revolver, and a bowie-knife of the best make.

"Well, Mephisto, we will be off, as soon as I have eaten a snack," said the man to his horse, and, taking from a haversack, a light lunch of hard-tack and buffalo-meat, he soon disposed of it.

Then his horse was saddled and bridled, and the rider mounted, just as a wild yell was heard, not a quarter of a mile distant.

Instantly horse and horseman were on the alert, and riding out of the dense copse of trees, the stranger looked earnestly up the stream.

What he saw there caused him to dash swiftly forward, and in two minutes' time he came upon a thrilling scene.

Two maidens were struggling in the grasp of five

Cheyenne warriors, who were binding them hand and foot.

With a revolver in each hand the horseman charged right into the midst and on past the Cheyennes; but two of them had fallen beneath his unerring aim, and a third was wounded.

The wounded red-skin and his two remaining companions at once sprung to the shelter of some large trees, near by, rifles in hand; but the horseman had sprung from his horse, and with a word sent him on out of danger while he took cover behind a friendly clump of cottonwoods.

Thus the four stood, rifles in hand, three against one, and the two maidens lay bound upon the ground, half a hundred yards from the Indians.

How it might have terminated is hard to tell; but how it did terminate is soon told, for suddenly two rifle-shots rung out, and down went two of the Cheyenne warriors, while two horsemen dashed into sight with a yell upon their lips.

Surprised in the rear, and between two fires, the remaining Cheyenne, with an echoing yell, bounded from shelter, and ran swiftly toward a group of willows, where were visible five Indian ponies; but his first foe sprung forward, his rifle was leveled, and he fell in his tracks.

But though the Cheyennes had been slain, a cloud rested upon the brow of the first comer upon the scene, and words arose to his lips that proved he was not thankful for the coming of others.

"Curse those men! I would have had it all my own way if they had not come, and the maidens would have owed *me* their lives."

But, with a smile banishing the frown, he advanced toward those who had so opportunely arrived upon the scene.

"Gentlemen, I owe you thanks; my name is Anton Rivas, of New Mexico; but here are two whom your coming has served even more than me," and he led the way to where the two girls yet lay in terrible suspense as to their fate.

"I am glad to meet you, Senor Rivas; I am Arthur Gray, a captain of cavalry in the army, and my companion is Lasso Dan, the scout and guide at Fort Hays, Kansas. We saw these Indians, and were flanking them when we saw you suddenly charge, single-handed, into their midst."

"Yas, pard, yer are a trumpkeerd on ther shoot, by jingo! but while you an' ther capt'in look arter ther ladies, I'll jist go to Injin hair farmin'." and Lasso Dan walked toward the nearest Cheyenne warrior, scalping-knife in hand.

"Ladies, have no fear; you are safe from harm, thanks to this gentleman, who alone charged your five captors," and kneeling, Arthur Gray delicately released the bonds from two pairs of as pretty little feet as it had been his good-luck to catch sight of for many a long day; then the hands were also freed, and Maud and Queen aided to rise by their preservers.

"Captain Gray, ladies, gives me undue praise. I saw your danger, and, as any man should do, came to your aid, but I had three against me when the captain and his comrade rode up. I trust you feel no inconvenience from your fright and being bound?" and Anton Rivas spoke in a voice soft and earnest.

Had Queen and Maud, as romantic girls, wished for it, they could not have had two finer-looking men to rescue them than those who stood before them, and in earnest tones they thanked them for their rescue, while Lasso Dan coming up, put in:

"Yer sarvent, leddies! Hopes I sees yer well, though it looked durned sickly fer yer a while back. Was yer captured from yer homes by them 'tarnal red-skins, or was yer out gallavantin' on ther pararer like silly gals will, an' got tuk in? Don't know o' any settlers hereabout?"

"No; I live at Fort McPherson. I am the daughter of Louis Woodbridge, Post Trader."

"Knows yer daddy well, miss; a squar' man all over; an' is this yer sister?"

"No, this is a young lady of whom you have doubtless heard. I was captured by the Indians near the fort, two weeks ago, and I am now on my return, with Red Plume as my kind guide."

"Red Plume! ther Hermit Huntress! Holy snakes, is you thet peert gal o' ther pararer? I'm right durned glad ter now ye," and Lasso Dan held forth his hand, which Maud grasped warmly, for she liked the blunt old scout.

Then, turning to Queen, she said:

"As these gentlemen are doubtless all going to the fort, Queen, I will leave you now and return to the Republican."

In vain was it that Queen urged and entreated her to go on to the fort with her and remain a few days; she was determined to go back, and refusing both the earnest proffers of Anton Rivas and Lasso Dan to accompany her, she kissed Queen affectionately, while tears stood in the eyes of each; mounted her pony, with a spring from the ground, and with a wave of her hand bounded away down the Red Willow.

Sad at heart, at the loss of her friend, Queen was raised to her saddle by Anton Rivas, who said he was going to Fort McPherson, with a view of establishing a stock ranch near there on the Platte.

Then the maiden and her three escorts set off for the fort, distant between forty and fifty miles.

But as they rode along, Anton Rivas seemed to worry a great deal about Red Plume. He spoke of her danger continually, and after riding half a dozen miles, stopped abruptly.

"Miss Woodbridge, as you are safely cared for, I will return on the trail of your fair young friend, for I have a presentiment in my mind that harm will befall her."

"I'll go to the Red Willow and strike her trail. I am a good plainsman, and my horse is untiring and swift, I trust to meet you soon again, Miss Woodbridge. Gentlemen, I bid you good-morning!" and with a courtly grace that seemed natural to him, the New Mexican turned to the right about and set off on the back trail at an easy gallop, while Queen and her escorts continued on to the fort, all favorably impressed with the man who had just left them.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RETURN.

WHEN the sentinel at Fort McPherson, by the light of the setting sun, looked across the prairie and descried three persons approaching, and in one of them recognized Prairie Queen, the Post Trader's daughter, he called lustily for the corporal of the guard, and as the maiden rode up she was greeted with rousing cheers.

General Emory was in his quarters attending to some business with Louis Woodbridge, who had grown thin and pale of late, and coming out to see the cause of the excitement, so unusual in the fort, their eyes fell upon the beautiful Queen, and two others that were believed dead, and whose bodies Captain Taylor and a large force had gone out to bury, at the same time hoping to punish the Indians.

As Captain Arthur Gray and Lasso Dan approached, they were also greeted with cheers, and met a warm welcome from General Emory and his officers.

Entering the general's quarters refreshments were placed before them, and then the stories of their adventures were told. Queen making known how she was captured, when having gone out for a ride on the prairie, but carefully concealing the cause of her going, and then telling how she had been rescued from the very den of lions by the pluck and skill of Fancy Frank.

"That is a most remarkable man. Look out you don't lose your heart with him, Miss Queen," warned the general, with a smile.

Queen blushed, but went on to tell how they had left the Indian camp, and her despair when the Scout

fell fainting from his horse, but her joy when Red Plume came to the rescue.

"And where does this strange and mysterious creature live?" asked the general.

"That I cannot tell you, sir, for I am sworn to secrecy."

"But she cannot live alone?"

"I am also bound not to give you any information upon that subject, sir; but, certain it is she is as fearless as a man, and is versed in all prairie-craft and Indian cunning, while she is as good as she is beautiful."

"I believe you, Miss Queen; but you say the Scout was taken to her home?"

"Yes, General Emory; and knowing my anxiety to communicate with my father, Red Plume, as you call her at the fort, carried the note to the camp that night, for, as long as the Scout was in danger of dying, my duty kept me by his side."

"And he is recovering now, I hope?"

"Yes, sir; and, under the guidance of Red Plume, I was returning to the fort, when we met the adventure on the Red Willow which I have told you of, and which we were rescued from by Captain Gray, and good Dan here, not forgetting the brave man who went back on the trail of Red Plume."

"Well, there has been more mystery around this fort of late than would furnish material for a sensational novel; but, thank God, you are back again in safety, Miss Queen; and, Gray, you and Dan are to be congratulated, too; but I hope no harm will befall that wild girl, or the brave fellow who returned to aid her, for we want just such good men as settlers here," and his guests departing, the general was left alone to think over what had lately transpired around his frontier post, while Captain Gray and Lasso Dan were well cared for, and Louis Woodbridge, a happy man, and Queen returned to their home.

Several days after Captain Taylor and his men came back, having visited the canyon where Captain Gray's party had been besieged, and not finding the bodies of the captain and Lasso Dan, and observing the remains of the dummies, came to the conclusion that the two men had cleverly eluded the Indians.

Pushing on the troopers came upon the demoralized band of warriors at the Republican, and had engaged them in a hot fight; but night coming on the redskins had escaped.

Visiting the scene of the attack on the wagon-train, the troopers had found a number of unburied bodies, their heads scalped, and had given them decent burial, after which they had started on their return to the fort, where they were delighted to learn that not only had Arthur Gray and Lasso Dan returned, but also Queen Woodbridge.

To celebrate the return of the fair girl, the officers gave a grand entertainment, and one of Queen's most ardent admirers was Roy Reese, who, after an interview with General Emory, upon his return from the Republican, had taken up his quarters at the fort, Jack Nelson and his comrades still remaining in his pay for reasons known only to the youth himself.

Struck with the handsome face and youth of Roy Reese, Queen seemed to feel a deep interest in him, and they became fast friends, to the jealous rage of many other admirers of the maiden; but there was one other for whom the Trader's daughter seemed to care more than she did for the youth, and that was Arthur Gray, who each day felt himself becoming more deeply in love with the beautiful girl and wondering how it would all end.

CHAPTER XX.

OBSTACLES IN THE TRAIL.

WHEN Anton Rivas had said that his horse was both swift and of long endurance, he had fully spoken the truth, for, when turned upon the back trail, he held his easy lope back to the spot where the fight had occurred in the timber on the Red Wil-

low, and there striking the trail of Red Plume had gone on once more in that same untiring gait.

But, though Anton Rivas had pushed on steadily all day, sunset found him on the banks of the Republican river, at a point where the trail of the maiden's pony ended.

"By heavens! she has eluded me! Now what is to be done?"

Hardly had the words left his lips, and while his eyes were bent down upon the spot where the trail ended at the edge of the water, a white puff of smoke came from the face of the cliff upon the other shore, and a faint report was heard, just as a bullet struck the man in the forehead.

Like one dead, he fell from his horse and lay motionless upon the ground, while the frightened animal trotted off upon the prairie.

When Anton Rivas returned to consciousness, for he was only stunned by the shot, which had gone in under his scalp, he beheld, by the lingering light of the sun on the horizon, the tall form of a man bending over him—a man of herculean frame, but with long hair and beard that was almost white.

At the first glance into the wild bearded face and the long matted hair, Anton Rivas believed that he was dead and that his Satanic Majesty had come for him; but a closer look and his face grew deadly white as he rose to a sitting position, and cried:

"In the devil's name, who are you?"

"Men call me the Hermit Trapper of the Republican. Who are you?" came in deep, stern tones.

"First tell me why you fired upon me?" angrily demanded Anton Rivas.

"You followed the trail of a young girl to this point; you were becoming too curious and I fired upon you: now I thank God I did not kill you," said the old trapper, earnestly.

"Why?"

"Because I now know who you are. When I fired I looked upon you as I would upon any man who would wrong the one being I have to love in this world—the one being who has prevented my taking my own life to fly from the curse upon me."

The Hermit Trapper spoke with great vehemence, and his face worked strangely.

"You speak as though I was known to you."

"You are," was the curt reply.

"My name is Anton Rivas, and I come from New Mexico, yet I do not remember to have met you before."

"You lie in your false throat! Your name is not Anton Rivas!" was the savage rejoinder.

"Have a care, old man! I may forget your age," threateningly said the man who had called himself Anton Rivas.

"Bah! You are a fool, boy, for I could crush you as I could a child; but attempt not to deceive me with your lies, and hear me. You take your path and I will keep mine, for I would shun you as I would a snake."

"In Heaven's name who are you?" cried Rivas, springing to his feet.

"I believe that you know me," was the Hermit's reply; "but, should you not, I will tell you that I am one who once had a happy home, a wife and a baby boy; but that boy, the idol of his mother's heart and mine, grew to be a wild, reckless, sinful youth; yet still we loved him, forgave him, and prayed with him to lead a different life—are you listening, Anton Rivas?"

The man uttered no reply to the question, and stood with eyes bent down.

Then the Hermit Trapper continued:

"At length that boy went so far as to doom a young and lovely girl to infamy by, as he believed, a mock marriage; but the tool he employed was not so vile as he was, and engaged a young and inexperienced minister to perform the ceremony, and the young girl became in reality a wife; but her brother, and all others then, believed in her disgrace, and to avenge his sister's wrongs, the brother sought that worthless son of mine—sought him out,

and gave him a chance for his life, when he should have shot him down like a dog. That mercy on his part cost him his life, for my ignoble son shot him in the back and fled.

"Loving him as I did, I tried hard to effect his escape, but the hounds of the law were on his track, and they seized and brought him back.

"His trial followed, and with his just sentence that sent him to the gallows, his poor mother's heart was broken and she died; and more, my last dollar almost went, for I made gold flow like water to save him.

"But all to no use. The law had condemned him to death, and not one was there except myself and the woman he had wronged to beg for his life—are you listening, Anton Rivas?"

Still no reply from the other, who stood as motionless as a statue, and the Hermit Trapper continued:

"That poor girl went with her infant in her arms and begged the governor to save her husband; I added my prayers to hers, but it was of no avail—he must die!

"Then I became desperate, and with money raised from the sale of my home, I planned his escape, and carried it out; but God forgive me in aiding him, and when he was in danger of recapture, I killed two of his pursuers.

"He escaped, and I was seized and thrown into jail, and the sentence of death was passed upon me; but the night before my execution the jail caught fire, and I managed to get away, although loaded down with irons.

"Those iron bands a friend knocked from my wrists and ankles, and he also aided me to leave the country and come to this wild border, while I, with several others, was believed to have perished in the flames.

"Four years after my coming here, a wagon-train was attacked not many miles from where I lived, and the few settlers who composed it were nearly all murdered by the Indians.

"But one woman, with a baby of five years of age in her arms, fled from the scene after seeing her father shot down, and, unseen by the red fiends, ran for miles across the prairie, not knowing where she went and still clinging to her child.

"Rendered superstitious by my life here in these wilds, and nervous from having taken human life, I believed the woman, as she appeared in the moonlight, in her white night-dress, to be a spirit, and I leveled my rifle and fired.

"God will never forgive me for that act; I am accursed among men, Anton Rivas," said the Hermit Trapper, in his deep, trembling tones, while he passed his hand across his eyes, as if to shut out the sight of some horrid phantom of the past.

After a moment, in which Anton Rivas still stood like a statue, the Hermit Trapper went on:

"When I heard that poor creature scream, I came back to my senses and bounded to her side, and, oh God! she was dying, and I beheld her little child clutched close to her heart.

"Poor thing, she saw me, and believing she had been fired upon by Indians, blessed me for coming to her aid, and with her dying breath consigned her child to my trust.

"Think you she would have done so had she known that I had slain her?

"Oh, no! Rather would she have clasped the wee thing in her cold arms and let it die there on her breast from cold and hunger, than give it to me to care for.

"I accepted the trust, though, in atonement, and bore the little child and its mother to my home.

"The mother lies buried on the banks of the Republican; the child crossed this river an hour ago and is now in safety.

"Before the mother of that child died I recognized her; she was the wife so sinned against by my wicked son, and with her father, was coming to this border to find a new home.

"Now, Anton Rivas as you call yourself, you have heard my story, and I will tell you how that that girl was intrusted to my keeping and, by the God above, I will kill you if you ever attempt to cross her trail again.

"Go, for well do you know that patience can no longer be a virtue with me. Well do you know that every atom of love once held for you has gone from my heart.

"Go! and never look in my face or the face of your child again.

"Go! or I'll forget that you are my son, crime-ac-cursed though you be!"

With a cry of horror Anton Rivas turned and fled from the spot with the speed of a deer.

A shrill call brought his horse to his side, and springing into the saddle he sped away as though Satan rode on his crupper and cruelly his spurs sunk in the flanks of his surprised, frightened and straining horse.

CHAPTER XXI.

MORE DEVILTRY.

THE day after the arrival in the fort of Captain Taylor and his squadron, a stranger rode up to the quarters of General Emory—a stranger to all at the fort excepting three persons, whom the reader will know when I say that the new-comer gave his name as Anton Rivas.

In his interview with the general, Anton Rivas told how he had followed the trail of Red Plume to the very banks of the Republican, and there lost it, and having been fired upon from an ambush and wounded, he had saved his life merely by the speed of his splendid horse.

He also made known his intention of settling near the fort, and was referred by the general to Louis Woodbridge, the Post Trader, for all necessary information upon the subject.

The cabin home of the trader was some distance from the fort, and thither Anton Rivas wended his way and received a warm welcome from Queen and also her father, for he remembered the service the brave stranger had rendered his daughter.

"Now, Mr. Rivas, until you get settled, just make your home here. My cabin is a large one, and the spare room is at your service; then at night we can talk over our plans for settling, and I will give you all the advice and aid in my power," said the hospitable trader, and most willingly did Anton Rivas accept of his proffered hospitality, and was soon perfectly at home in his new quarters.

As he sat in his room some ten days after his arrival at the fort he saw Captain Arthur Gray approach the cabin, and heard him greet Queen, who sat upon the rude but pleasant balcony of the cabin.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Woodbridge! A pleasant evening for a walk; will you join me?"

"With pleasure, Captain Gray, if you will not come in."

"No; let us take the walk," and getting her hat, Queen joined the young officer.

"Above here on the river a mile, I saw some lovely wild flowers. Miss Woodbridge; they would make a beautiful bouquet," said Anton, leaning out of the open window.

"It is rather far to walk, but I would like the flowers," Queen confessed.

"Then a ride let it be, Miss Woodbridge. I will return as soon as I get my horse," and, Queen assenting, the young officer strode away, while she ordered the negro servant, who looked after her father's stock, to saddle her horse.

Ten minutes after the captain rode up, and the two dashed away together, a splendid-looking couple.

Gradually the afternoon passed away, the shadows lengthened, and twilight came, yet the two did not return, and when Louis Woodbridge came home to supper, and learned where Queen had gone, he was terribly alarmed.

"There is no fear but that they will soon return, Woodbridge. If they do not, I will mount my horse and ride forth in search of them."

"I will be so thankful, if you would; and if you do not find them, come to the store and let me know, at once," said the anxious father, and he arose from his untasted meal.

But, apparently feeling no alarm for the absent ones, Anton Rivas ate a hearty supper; then, mounting his horse, he rode away in the gathering twilight.

Two hours after, having received no word, as the man hoped, Louis Woodbridge, almost crazed with dread, returned to his deserted cottage, but Queen had not returned.

Instantly the poor man ran to the fort, and laid the case before General Emory.

"By Jove, Woodbridge, this is a bad business. I will have a squadron ordered out at once, and sent in search of them; but they cannot do much until morning.

"It was imprudent for them to go, as the scouts daily report Indians in the vicinity," said General Emory, and he at once gave orders for a company of cavalry to go in search of the lost couple.

"And you say that Mr. Rivas has not returned either?"

"No, general; he has been gone nearly three hours."

Finding from Coal, Mr. Woodbridge's negro servant, the direction taken by Queen and the captain, Lieutenant Charlie Rockwell at once set out in search of them, accompanied by a number of officers as volunteers, and the almost broken-hearted trader.

A ride of nearly two miles brought them to the spot on the river bank, where the negro had said they were going, and here, in the darkness, a white object caught their eyes.

It was a sheet of paper, torn from a note-book, and stuck upon a stick three feet high.

A dozen matches at once flashed, and by their light, written in a clear, bold hand, Lieutenant Rockwell read aloud:

"I came here and was set upon by a band of Indians, several of whom I shot, and as they fled, I will follow them, keeping them in sight, as I am confident they are the rear guard of a force that has captured the captain and Miss Woodbridge.

"Whoever finds this, let him take it to General Emory, that he may start a force in pursuit.

"Fearing to lose sight of the Indians in the darkness, I must hasten on; but I will leave what traces I can on the trail."

ANTON RIVAS."

"My God! my poor child!" broke from the lips of Louis Woodbridge, and he would have fallen but for the support of friendly arms.

"Well, Mr. Woodbridge, we will return to the fort, and the general will doubtless send out a large force in pursuit in the morning, for nothing can be done to-night," said Lieutenant Rockwell.

"I will give all I am worth to any man who will follow that trail to-night," cried the poor father; but all remained silent, and the party returned toward the fort. Not all of them, for Roy Keese and his trapper scouts remained behind, and seeing them tarry, Lasso Dan joined them.

"Pards, I wouldn't take a dollar o' ther old man's money; but I guesses as you feels as I do; we better strike out to-night," said the old Kansas scout.

"You bet, pard; this young gentleman has axed me ter bounce ther trail ter-night, an' though it will be slow work, I think we kin foller 'em, by watchin' ther natur' o' ther ground we is trailin' an' as we knows whar they is drivin' fer, so I says go," replied John Nelson.

"Agreed, pard," was the reply of Andy Barrett; and the Clifford Brothers and Arthur Ruff giving a like assent it was at once agreed upon to start at once.

"I am delighted to hear your decision, my friends. Here is money, so let two of you go to the post and

get what you may need for the trip and return at once; we will await you here, and I assure you, if I am successful in this trip I will divide two thousand dollars among you, and I almost think your money is as good as made."

The men looked at him in surprise, not exactly understanding what his words meant, though remembering them afterward; but believing him to be deeply in love with Queen Woodbridge they felt for him in his sorrow.

Andy Barrett and Hank Clifford at once returned to the post, while the others busied themselves in searching for all traces that might be of service to them.

Getting down upon his hands and knees Lasso Dan went sniffing around like a dog, and at last struck off across the prairie and disappeared from sight.

An hour after the two trappers returned with all necessary provisions for the trip, and the party mounted, Roy Reese leading Lasso Dan's horse.

A brisk gallop of a mile and they came upon that worthy, still progressing upon his hands and knees.

"My hands jist keeps ther trail ther hul time, pards; now some o' you try it awhile, fer my back are 'most broke," said Lasso Dan, and John Nelson at once took his place at *all-four* trailing.

Thus the party went on for several miles when Nelson said:

"Pards, it are plain now; they is roundin' ther head o' ther north fork o' ther Medicine, an' we mou't as well press on thar, an' then we kin git ther direction they travels from thar."

"Good sense, by jingo!" said Lasso Dan, and then at a sweeping gallop they pushed on until they were some miles from the fort. Here they again searched for and found the trail, running directly south.

"They is headin' fer ther Republican, so we'll push right on till daylight, an' then we won't be far wrong," said Hank Clifford.

"Sense, by jingo!" was Lasso Dan's reply, and the party again pressed forward, and two hours before day, halted for rest on the Red Willow.

An hour and a half's rest, a substantial breakfast, and then, just at the first glimmer of light, they were in the saddle.

"Treed, by jingo!" cried Lasso Dan, as he rode down to the creek. "Heur are ther trail, an' they is not so durned many o' them, nuther; only 'bout thirty; an' heur are ther huf-tracks o' ther leddy's spotted pony, ar' ther capt'in's horse, 'kase I knows 'em well; an', by jingo, ef heur ain't ther huf-tracks o' thet stranger as is from New Mexico—he's a ripper, I tell you, pards, an' is a-pushin' on alone as though he'd eat ther whole lay-out when he catches up with 'em."

The marks referred to by Lasso Dan were now plain to all eyes, excepting those of Roy Reese, and he then made a discovery: he found a small bit of paper pinned to a stick.

"Here, boys, I've found what escaped your eyes," and he read aloud what was written on the paper as follows:

"The Indians are heading for the Republican—I will leave what traces I can."

ANTON RIVAS."

Folding the paper, Roy Reese placed it in his pocket, and said quietly:

"Now see the gain we made by starting in the night. The troops have hardly left yet, and we are forty-five miles ahead of them."

"Sense, by jingo, an' ther Injins has more than a night's start o' ther sojers; but them young ossifers will push right on, fer I believes thet every durned one o' 'em loves thet Woodbridge gal."

"Do you wonder at it, Dan?" asked Roy Reese, with a smile.

"No, by jingo! 'kase she's a angil, only her wings hain't sprouted yit; guesses they'll keep shady till she gits ter Heavin, whar she kin tickle a harp; but come, pards, let's git!" and off again the party started, now following the trail without the slightest trouble.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

WHILE Roy Reese and his trapper comrades were pushing rapidly on in pursuit of the flying Indians, the pursued were dividing their forces into three parties to throw their enemies off their track.

Arriving at Blackwood creek they played a very clever *ruse*, for Arthur Gray and Queen were transferred with their saddles and bridles to the backs of Indian ponies, and thus mounted, under a guard of ten picked braves, they were rushed on toward the Frenchman's Fork at a point where Palisade creek flows into it, while another force of fifteen warriors, with the iron-shod horses of the young officer and maiden, headed for the Republican at the junction of that river with Frenchman's Fork, and a third party of ten braves followed Blackwood creek down until it flowed into the Republican.

Having thus divided their forces and sent the horses of the captives with the larger party, as though to make believe their owners were with them, the small band with their prisoners pushed rapidly on their way, and urged their horses without rest until they arrived at Palisade creek, where they went into camp in some timber; but on their trail was one who did not seem at a loss when he came to where the bands divided, as, after carefully searching the ground, he again mounted his horse and kept right on after the force that had the captives in charge.

Riding rapidly, he came in sight of the timber of Palisade creek just at sunset, and at once made a *detour* to the left, and slowly approached the stream.

In the mean time, utterly worn out by her loss of rest and hard ride of twenty-four hours, poor Queen sunk to rest upon a blanket a chief had given her, and Arthur Gray threw his cloak over her, for he had fortunately come off with it strapped to the back of his saddle.

Then he too threw himself down to rest.

Having partaken of their supper the red-skins sought rest, all except the guard at the edge of the timber, and soon the whole camp was as silent as the grave.

Thus an hour passed, and what caused Queen Woodbridge, worn out as she was, to open her eyes she never knew; but she awoke with a slight start and saw a form bending over her.

At first she believed it was an Indian warrior, and she was about to cry out in alarm, when in a whisper she distinctly heard the words:

"Be still as death, and I will aid you."

Then, bending over her the unknown visitor cut the bonds that bound her and aided her to her feet.

Supporting her, he led her to the outskirts of the camp, and there she paused.

"Captain Gray must not be left."

"No; I will return for him," came in a low whisper, and she was urged on for some distance, and then brought out into the light of a new moon.

With a half cry she started back, for a well known face and form was before her.

"Richard Sanford!"

"Yes, Queen, I have come to save you," said the man, in earnest tones.

"I did not expect it was you, for I believed you far away; but I am glad to meet you once again, that you may not at least believe me ungrateful. Still, first return and save Captain Gray."

"Queen Woodbridge, what is that man to you?" and Dick Sanford spoke in a deep, earnest tone.

"Shall I tell you?" said the girl, almost defiantly.

"Yes, I wish to know all."

"He has my promise to become his wife."

"Ah! Very sudden, isn't it?" sneered the man.

"Yes; but he saved my life, and my gratitude turned to love."

"Do you love every man who has saved your life? for if you do, there is Fancy Frank, the Scout; Anton Rivas, and my very humble self—you see I am posted, though an exile from the association of my race."

"Yes, and God knows I feel for you in your sorrow; and now let me tell you that as you had once saved my life, Richard Sanford, I was determined that you should not die, and I had all my plans arranged to aid your escape."

The man started and for a moment seemed touched; then he said:

"That was impossible, Queen."

"No; it was very possible, for my ally was Brocky Jack, the half-breed; he had horses in readiness for you, relays every ten miles to the Republican, and a soldier, who was unable to get furlough, was to desert and go with you, for he was on duty at the guard-house."

"Did you do this for me, Queen?"

"Yes, and when one other aided you to escape, I did not wish you to leave believing me wholly ungrateful for the past, and mounted my Deerfoot to overtake you and tell you all, and bid you farewell. Now you know all. I beg of you to go and rescue poor Captain Gray from those terrible Indians."

"Poor Captain Gray, as you call him, Queen, I will rescue upon one condition."

"And that is—"

"Swear to become my wife and I will set Arthur Gray at liberty."

"Never!"

"Then he remains a prisoner to the Indians. Think again; I love you, and you shall be made happy in all things."

"Richard Sanford, I know you better than you think I do. I know how treacherous you were to one who saved your life—to a girl you had in your power, and I would never link my fate with yours."

"The Indians are cruel to their prisoners."

"I know it but too well."

"They will burn him at the stake."

"Oh, God, have mercy upon me!" groaned the unhappy girl.

"What is your answer?"

"I have given it; I will go back and die with Arthur Gray."

"Fool!"

"No; I would be the greater fool to become your wife. Farewell, Mr. Sanford," and she started back toward the Indian camp.

Without a word he stepped one side, and she silently crept back into the Indian camp.

Not a twig broke beneath her feet; not a leaf stirred, and she lay down in her blanket once more, and pressed her hands hard upon her heart, to still its aching throbs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

BEFORE even the eastern skies grew gray, the Indian band, with their captives, were again on the march, heading for the head-waters of Porcupine creek.

Arriving on the banks of Porcupine creek, they halted for breakfast and then, for the first time that morning, both Queen and Captain Gray caught sight of the face of the man who rode in advance, and who was clothed in all the paraphernalia of a great chief.

With a cry of horror, Queen recognized the dark, evil face of Dick Sanford, and the words came to the lips of Arthur Gray:

"What! a renegade white man the chief of a band of Sioux?"

"Yes, Captain Gray, I am chief of an Indian tribe. An exile from my own race, I became a renegade," said Dick Sanford, almost savagely.

"Ha! I recognize you, now; by Heaven, you are the man who led the red devils against my train."

"The same, my dear captain, for I am now the foe of all whites since at last this fair girl, whom I once saved from a terrible death, has turned against me."

"Then you knew him once, Queen?" asked Arthur Gray.

"He speaks the truth; he once saved me from an

enraged buffalo bull, and he was one of the most daring soldiers in the Fifth Cavalry; but alas! for himself, he had an evil heart, took the life of a comrade, and General Emory banished him from the border."

"I have heard of him; this is doubtless, Richard Sanford?"

"That *was* my name, Captain Gray; the Indians call me Serare-Root-Kary, which, being interpreted, means, Every-man-behind-him. I gained that name in my attack on your train. In future I shall make myself known among the whites as Red Dick, the Renegade."

"Man, I pity you," was all that Arthur Gray said, while large tears stood in the eyes of Queen.

"Can I ask what is your intention toward this lady and myself?" said the captain, after a pause.

"Certainly; I will take you to my village, in the hills beyond the Republican, and of which that pleasant red gentleman, Old Whistler, is chief, and there Miss Woodbridge shall become my wife, according to Indian ceremony, and you, I swear, by Heaven, shall be burnt at the stake, as part of the wedding festivities."

Both Arthur Gray and Queen were too deeply moved to speak, and with a cruel sneer Red Dick turned away.

But, just then, there came a distant report, the whiz of a bullet, and a warrior fell dead across the fire he was building.

Instantly all was a scene of excitement; the two captives were placed on their ponies and securely bound to them, and the Indians began a hasty retreat; but again came an unerring bullet and another brave went down.

"It comes from across the creek! Back into the timber!" cried Red Dick, and he hastily led the party to shelter, and then sent out two Indian scouts to reconnoiter.

Some ten minutes were they gone, when there were heard two shots in rapid succession, a death war-whoop, and a ringing yell that at once told the Indians who their foe was.

"The Evil Spirit! the Evil Spirit of the Plains!" was the cry of the Sioux, and they turned toward Red Dick, not knowing what to do.

Then again came that ringing yell, and the renegade chief at once gave the signal for the return of his two scouts if they were alive.

But the signal remained unanswered, and all knew that they were dead.

"It looks cowardly to fly from one man; but I'll not risk losing my captives," muttered Red Dick, and they at once set forth on the trail they had come, intending to follow it a short distance and then strike straight for the Republican.

Having ridden a mile out upon the prairie, they suddenly saw Fancy Frank emerge from the timber they had just left, and behind him came two others—an old man with long gray hair and beard, and a young girl, in whom the reader will readily recognize the Hermit Trapper and Red Plume.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FANCY FRANK'S MARVELOUS ACHIEVEMENT.

At the sight of the Hermit and Red Plume, Red Dick turned livid and reeled in his saddle; but recovering himself quickly, he set his teeth hard and urged the party on.

But suddenly a cry broke from the lips of one of the braves, and all eyes turned in the direction in which he gazed.

There, just crossing over a roll in the prairie, and in their front, not half a mile away, were seven horsemen, who, discovering the Indians and their captives, gave a yell of joy and started toward them at a run.

Wheeling short to the right, Red Dick led the flight in a run directly for the Republican river, while a brave rode on each side of Arthur Gray and Queen and lashed their horses at every bound.

On, on like the wind sped the Indian band, and be-

hind them, from two different directions, came Fancy Frank's party and Roy Reese and his followers.

Better mounted, Fancy Frank, the Hermit Trapper and Red Plume gained rapidly upon the fugitives, and came out upon their trail ahead of the other pursuers, excepting Roy Reese, who cried as he came up and recognized the famous plainsman:

"Scout, for God's sake do not kill that man! He is my game."

"Of course I would not fire upon an army officer, as I see he is by his uniform," replied Fancy Frank.

"No, no, not that one! I mean the supposed Indian chief; I saw his face distinctly with my glass, and he is a white man—ay, more, he is the one I came to these plains to find," said Roy Reese, as they fairly flew along over the ground, and the Scout and his companions gazed upon the youth's white face with strange surprise.

"I'll not harm him, sir; but they must not reach the Republican, and there is but one way to stop them," declared Fancy Frank.

"And that is—" asked Roy.

"I will show you, sir."

Quick as a flash the repeating-rifle went to the shoulder, and two sharp reports, fired almost together, followed; down went one Indian pony running on Queen's right, and the warrior on the left fell from his horse, while from the lips of the remaining savages burst a wild yell, that was echoed by one of joy from Lasso Dan and his party coming on behind.

Freed from his guards, the pony ridden by Queen bounded to one side, and rushed away across the prairie, his rider unable to guide him, as her hands were bound.

Instantly Red Plume spurred away in chase, a cheer breaking from her lips as she beheld the pony keep on, unhurt by the pistol-shots sent after him by Red Dick.

Failing in bringing down Queen or her pony, for he had fired to kill, Red Dick turned toward Arthur Gray—a wild, wicked light in his eyes.

Ordering the two Indians who guarded him to ride on, he wheeled alongside the bound man, who looked him defiantly in the face, and slowly raised his pistol.

"Captain Gray, I shall have my revenge on you, and then escape, to some day in the future bring down yonder haughty beauty's head in sorrow and shame."

"Accursed hound, you are base enough to do any vile deed," was the quick retort.

With a mocking laugh Red Dick again raised his revolver and pointed it straight at the head of Arthur Gray, but, while his finger was lingering on the trigger with fiendish delight, there came another shot from the unerring rifle of Fancy Frank, and the splendid animal ridden by the renegade went down in his tracks, while the pistol, exploding as he fell, shot the pony ridden by Arthur Gray through the head, and sent him headlong to the ground.

Both men were stunned by the fall, while the four Indians yet remaining, continued on in their mad flight, fully confident that the Evil Spirit was indeed in pursuit.

"They must not escape or they will bring down their whole village upon us," cried Fancy Frank, and a shout to his horse brought him forward at a speed that those who witnessed it, did not believe a horse could do.

As he ran, the Scout's unerring rifle went again to his shoulder, and the report was a death-knell to an Indian brave.

Then again it rose for the eye to run along the barrel, and once more came a death-yell, until after a chase of fifteen minutes Fancy Frank retraced his steps, for he had done his deadly work well.

As he rode up he saw with joy that Arthur Gray was once more upon his feet, and then his eyes fell upon the tall form, and white, stern face of Dick the Renegade, a prisoner amid the little group that surrounded him. In the background stood four per-

sons gazing intently at the Renegade Chief, and they were the Hermit Trapper, Red Plume, Queen Woodbridge and Roy Reese.

CHAP ER XXV.

A DOUBLE DEATH-SHOT.

As Fancy Frank, looking a little thin and wan after his illness, rode up, Lasso Dan cried out:

"Three rousers, pards, fer ther best man on both sides o' ther Rockies, by jingo!"

Instantly three rousing cheers were given, not only Arthur Gray joining in, but also Red Plume and Queen.

But, there were three persons whose lips remained mute; the stern-faced prisoner, the Hermit Trapper and Roy Reese.

Raising his hat in salute, the Scout sprung from the back of Red Angel and grasped the hand of Arthur Gray, for they had known each other for years.

Then he turned and congratulated Queen, saying with a smile:

"It seems you are always getting into scrapes, Miss Queen."

"Yes, and it seems that a certain handsome scout I know of is always getting me out of them. But, joking aside, sir, I ag in owe you more than life."

Ere the Scout could reply, Roy Reese stepped forward and addressed him:

"That man, Richard Sanford, is your prisoner, sir; but I beg of you to allow me to claim him."

"Assuredly if you wish it, so it is not to let him escape."

"Escape! I let Richard Sanford escape?" cried the youth in a tone that turned the eyes of the Renegade quickly toward him.

"And who are you, may I ask, that so longs for my life?" demanded Red Dick, sneeringly.

"Ha, ha, Dick Sanford, have you forgotten the young brother of the woman you brought down to shame seven years ago, or are your victims so numerous you cannot recall the name of *Floyd*?"

"Yes, I remember you now; you are Hugh Floyd. Your sister is dead, I believe," returned Red Dick, with the utmost coolness.

"I am glad you remember me, Dick Sanford, for I have tracked you for years, and now you shall meet me face to face."

"I certainly have no objection to sending you after your sister. Will you untie my arms, sir, and allow me to oblige this youth?" and he turned to Fancy Frank, who said quietly:

"Mr. Reese, soon this man must be executed for his crimes; are you willing to wait and—"

"No! he must die by *my* hand."

"But he is a dead shot, and you risk your life uselessly."

"It matters not! Let us meet each other with pistols at ten paces."

The Scout shrugged his shoulders, and replied:

"Very well, if you are determined upon it. Maud, had not you and Miss Queen better start on the back trail? We will soon overtake you," and Frank turned to the maidens; but Roy Reese said, quickly:

"No, I beg the ladies to remain. Their eyes are accustomed to wild scenes, and this man dragged down a pure girl to shame and then fled and left her; they need not dread seeing him punished; and more, Miss Woodbridge, in the man before you, you behold also he that called himself Anton Rivas, and who came to the fort in disguise, and whose Indians captured you and Captain Gray."

"I recognized him by the writing on the paper he pinned on the stick, where he says he killed the Indians found dead there. Captain Gray, how were you and Miss Woodbridge captured, may I ask?"

"We dismounted to gather wild flowers, and were set upon by a number of savages, three of whom I killed."

"Enough; now you know this man in his true light."

"Not wholly."

It was the deep voice of the Hermit Trapper that spoke.

Then he continued, in the same deep tones:

"*That man is my own son*; that man drove me a wanderer from my home, and broke his mother's heart, and not one word will I utter to ask mercy for him now."

All were surprised at the startling revelation of the Hermit Trapper, and none more so than Maud; but little she knew that Richard Sanford was her own father, and that dread secret the old Hermit was determined she should not then know.

From the face of the Hermit Trapper all eyes turned upon that of Richard Sanford but it was stern, calm, immovable; nothing to be said or done could move him, then.

"Now, sir, I am ready to meet that youth. If I am bound for Satan's home, let me take company," broke from the lips of the renegade.

Quietly Fancy Frank placed a weapon in the hand of each, and the two took their places.

Then the Scout gave the word, and the two pistols flashed together.

Red Dick sprung into the air, and fell heavily, but he raised himself quickly on his arm, and, as he saw Roy Reese walking toward him, he cried:

"Great God! have I missed him?"

"No, Richard Sanford, you have given me my death-wound; but I would not die until I tell you that *I am not Hugh Floyd, but the woman you so cruelly wronged*. I swore to have your life, and I am now content to die."

She sunk down upon her knees, and Fancy Frank sprung toward her; but he was too late, for she fell by the side of Richard Sanford—a corpse!

A moment more and he too, had breathed his last, while up dashed Captain Taylor and four companies of the gallant Fifth; but the cheer of the troopers died away at sight of the sad group standing around those two dead bodies.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

READER mine, my almost too true story is nearly ended; I have only to say that the gallant officers and men of the army who are herein mentioned still live to render good service to their country, and protect the settlers of the far West from the savage foe.

Lasso Dan lost his life in the battle in which Old Whistler, the Sioux chief, was killed, and brave Andy Barrett was soon afterward killed by a Sioux; while Jack Nelson, Arthur Ruff and the Clifford brothers are now trapping on the Running Water and its tributaries.

Louis Woodbridge, the Post Trader, had had enough of the border, and moved to New York to live on the fortune he had honestly accumulated; but shortly after his arrival he again lost his beautiful daughter, as Captain Arthur Gray had stolen her heart and won her hand, and no happier couple live to-day than those two, though I might speak of another pair who are equally happy—Mr. and Mrs. Frank Barbour of Colorado, for Fancy Frank and Red Plume are man and wife.

And one more—Mark Sanford, whose love for his wicked son drove him to ruin and crime, still lives in his lonely cavern, his only companion the Pawnee Indian boy, Red Bird, whom he had taken years before from a cruel Cheyenne warrior.

Not far from the cavern are two graves with no head-boards to designate who lie beneath the green sod; but they are the last resting-places of Richard Sanford and poor Irene Floyd.

Those two lonely graves, and the strange stories told of the lonely old dweller in the cavern on the cliff, cause both Indians and whites to give the place a wide berth, for all stand in deadly fear of the snowy-haired Hermit of the Republican and the graves by which he is surrounded.

THE END.

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